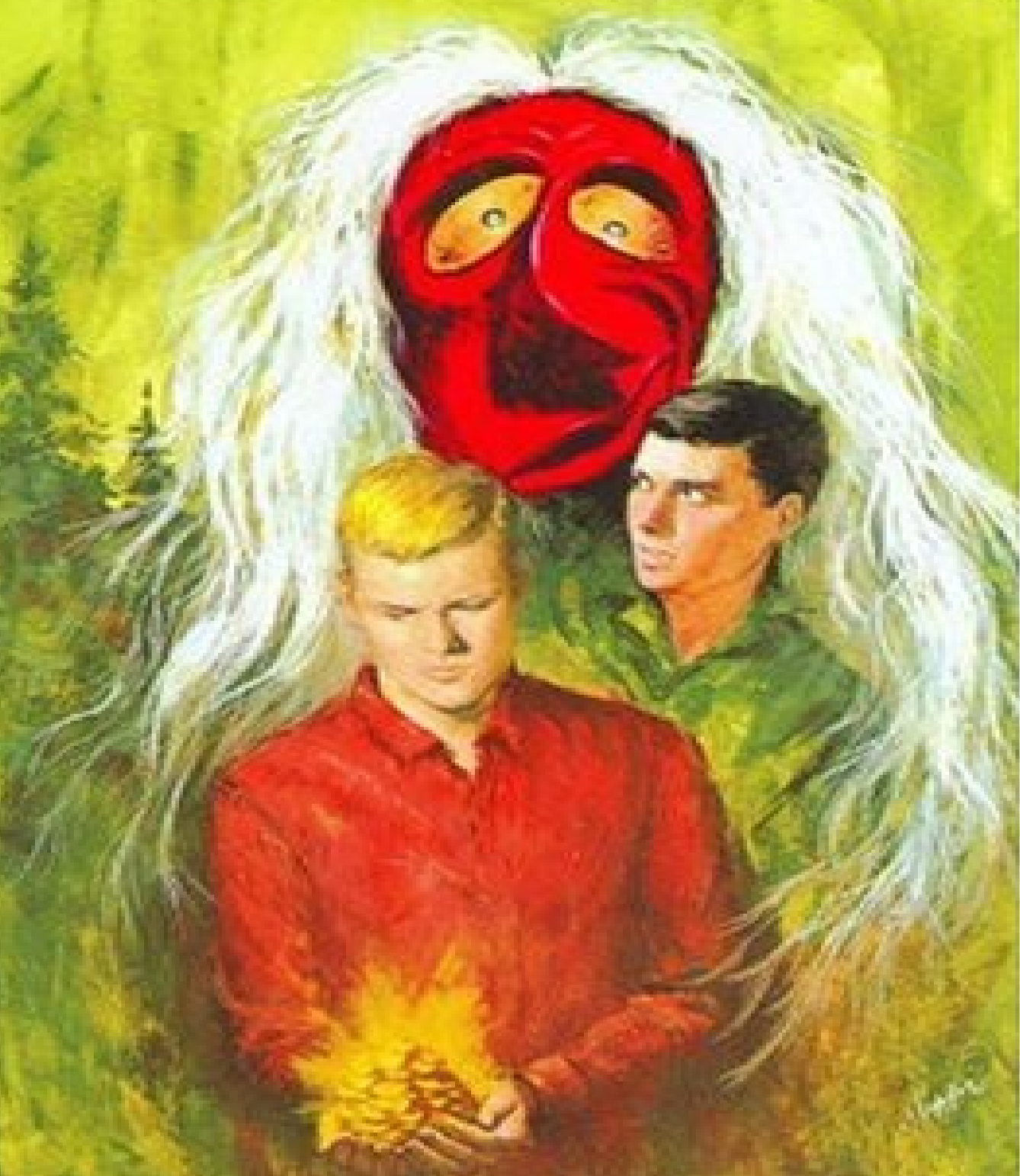


THE MELTED COINS



FRANKLIN W. DIXON

THE MELTED COINS

By FRANKLIN W. DIXON

No. 23 in the Hardy Boys series.

This is the original 1944 text.

In the 1944 original, the Hardy Boys foil a coin counterfeiting ring [More complete (spoiler) plot description is placed at the end.] In one reviewer's opinion this is the stupidest plot premise of any Hardy Boys story. The 1970 revision is completely different.

The Hardy Boys series by Franklin W. Dixon, the first 58 titles.

The first year is the original year. The second is the year it was revised.

01 The Tower Treasure 1927, 1959

02 The House on the Cliff 1927, 1959

03 The Secret of the Old Mill 1927, 1962

04 The Missing Chums 1927, 1962

05 Hunting for Hidden Gold 1928, 1963

06 The Shore Road Mystery 1928, 1964

07 The Secret of the Caves 1929, 1965

08 The Mystery of Cabin Island 1929, 1966

09 The Great Airport Mystery 1930, 1965

- 10 What Happened at Midnight 1931, 1967
- 11 While the Clock Ticked 1932, 1962
- 12 Footprints Under the Window 1933, 1962
- 13 The Mark on the Door 1934, 1967
- 14 The Hidden Harbor Mystery 1935, 1961
- 15 The Sinister Sign Post 1936, 1968
- 16 A Figure in Hiding 1937, 1965
- 17 The Secret Warning 1938, 1966
- 18 The Twisted Claw 1939, 1964
- 19 The Disappearing Floor 1940, 1964
- 20 The Mystery of the Flying Express 1941, 1968
- 21 The Clue of the Broken Blade 1942, 1969
- 22 The Flickering Torch Mystery 1943, 171
- 23 The Melted Coins 1944, 1970
- 24 The Short Wave Mystery 1945, 1966
- 25 The Secret Panel 1946, 1969
- 26 The Phantom Freighter 1947, 1970
- 27 The Secret of Skull Mountain 1948, 1966
- 28 The Sign of the Crooked Arrow 1949, 1970
- 29 The Secret of the Lost Tunnel 1950, 1968

- 30 The Wailing Siren Mystery 1951, 1968
- 31 The Secret of Wildcat Swamp 1952, 1969
- 32 The Crisscross Shadow 1953, 1969
- 33 The Yellow Feather Mystery 1954, 1971
- 34 The Hooded Hawk Mystery 1954, 1971
- 35 The Clue in the Embers 1955, 1972
- 36 The Secret of Pirates' Hill 1956, 1972
- 37 The Ghost of Skeleton Rock 1957, 1966
- 38 The Mystery at Devil's Paw 1959, 1973
- 39 The Mystery of the Chinese Junk 1960
- 40 The Mystery of the Desert Giant 1961
- 41 The Clue of the Screeching Owl 1962

- 42 The Viking Symbol Mystery 1963
- 43 The Mystery of the Aztec Warrior 1964
- 44 The Haunted Fort 1965
- 45 The Mystery of the Spiral Bridge 1966
- 46 The Secret Agent on Flight 101 1967
- 47 The Mystery of the Whale Tattoo 1968
- 48 The Arctic Patrol Mystery 1969

49 The Bombay Boomerang 1970

50 Danger on the Vampire Trail 1971

51 The Masked Monkey 1972

52 The Shattered Helmet 1973

53 The Clue of the Hissing Serpent 1974

54 The Mysterious Caravan 1975

55 The Witch-Master's Key 1976

56 The Jungle Pyramid 1977

57 Mystery of the Firebird Rocket 1978

58 Sting of the Scorpion 1979

Illustrated by Paul Laune NEW YORK

GROSSET & DUNLAP

PUBLISHERS

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CHAPTER I

CURSE OF THE CABIBBEES

"There's one thing I will say for Mexican history," said Frank Hardy as he put aside the book he had been reading, "it isn't dull."

His brother Joe, working at a crossword puzzle, glanced up and grinned.

"I read that book. Plenty exciting. Especially those chapters about the bandits."

"They were daring all right," agreed Frank. "Those fellows must have given the government a lot of trouble."

"No doubt about that. And a Mexican bandit must have seemed mighty romantic, too."

But-----"

The ringing of the hall telephone interrupted Joe.

"I'll answer it," said Frank. "Probably somebody has a case for Dad. Since he isn't home, maybe we can work on it till he gets back."

The boy went into the hall and took up the receiver.

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2 The Melted Coins "Is Fenton Hardy there!" asked a gruff voice.

"I'm sorry. He's out just now. Any message?"

" This is Chief of Police Collig speaking. Is that you, Frank?"

The boy brightened. This sounded promising. Although a telephone call from the police was nothing unusual in the Hardy home, since Mr. Hardy was a private detective of international fame, the boys were sometimes called upon to lend a hand in their father's absence. Now, reflected Frank hopefully, might be one of those times.

"Anything Joe and I can do, Chief?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said Collig. "I've just had a message to go over to City Hospital. The ambulance brought in a man who was found unconscious on the street."

"Why did you want Dad?" asked Frank, puzzled.

"The fellow muttered your father's name several times, so I thought he might be a friend."

"What's the man's name?"

"Don't know," returned the chief. "No identification of any kind. I figured probably your Dad would recognize him."

"Suppose Joe and I go over to the hospital and have a look at the patient."

"Wait for me," said Collig. "I'll pick you up on my way."

Curse of the Caribbees 3

Frank hurried into the living room.

"Come on," he said excitedly to his brother. "This may turn out to be a dud; on the other hand, it may be interesting."

"What goes on? Don't tell me it's a easel"

"Unidentified man at City Hospital. Hit-and-run accident probably. He muttered Dad's name, so the chief thinks we might know him."

The boys were out on the front porch waiting, when Chief Collig's official car swung around the corner and pulled up at the curb. They climbed in. The man, big, burly and gruff, grunted a word of greeting.

"Nothing much to this business, most likely," he said. "The man will probably wake up and tell us he's Joe Doakes from some place we never heard of. But if he *shouldn't* wake up, it might be difficult to find his relatives, since we don't know his name or where he comes from."

"How did he get hurt, Chief?" asked Frank. "Automobile accident T"

Collig shook his head. "Superintendent at the hospital says it looks as if he was beaten and robbed."

The officer swung the car around another corner, sped down a broad boulevard, and stopped at the curb in front of City Hospital. He and the Hardy boys got out.

"We'll make this snappy," said the chief.

They were whisked to the fourth floor in an elevator. A nurse met them in the corridor 4 The Melted Coins and beckoned the group to a small ward, where an interne was standing by a bed.

The individual they had come to see was dark complexioned-a good-looking, black-haired man of about

thirty. His eyes were closed. His head was bandaged. Frank and Joe scrutinized the unconscious patient.

"Recognize him?" asked Chief Collig.

The boys shook their heads. "Sorry, Chief. We've never seen him before," they replied.

The interne said, "I think he's Spanish."

"Looks like 'a foreigner all right," agreed the chief. "But what makes you think he is Spanish?"

"He talked a little," replied the young doctor. "Just babbling, of course. Sometimes in English with a Spanish accent, and sometimes in Spanish."

"What did he talk about?"

The interne shrugged. "All I could make out-that is, all that made sense-were the words 'Hardy' and 'Elm.' That's why I thought Fenton Hardy might know something about him."

"We're Mr. Hardy's sons," explained Frank. "We live on the corner of High and Elm, so perhaps Dad does know this man. You're sure he had nothing in his pockets that might identify him?"

"His pockets were cleaned out," declared the interne. "He'd been badly mauled and probably robbed."

Curse of the Caribbees 5

"Guess there's nothing more we can do here," said Chief Collig. "I've got my men searching the West Side area where this fellow was found. They may run across something."

"We'll ask Dad to come over and look at him as soon as he gets home," Joe promised.

The boys turned to leave. As they did so, the patient in the bed stirred. His lips moved.

They heard a hoarse whisper, as if the man were struggling to convey some message. The doctor leaned over, listening.

At first the whisper was unintelligible. Then, clearly, the stranger muttered: "The Curse of the Caribbees."

That was all.

"The Curse of the Caribbees!" repeated Joe wonderingly.

"He said that once before. Just after he was brought in," the interne explained.

"Sounds foolish," grunted Chief Collig. "Doesn't mean anything. Come on-let's get out of here. I have to get back to headquarters."

The injured man did not speak again, although his head stirred restlessly on the pillow.

The police officer and the boys left the room.

"Ask your Dad to run over and have a look at the man as soon as he comes home,"

said the chief as he drove the boys back to Elflx Street. "If we can discover his name, we'll have something to work on."

6 The Melted Coins Both Frank and Joe were thoughtful when they climbed out of the car and went up the

steps of their house.

"The Curse of the Caribbees," mused Frank. "Seems to me that this case is something more than a mere back-alley robbery."

They had little time to discuss the affair of the mysterious hospital patient, however, for their mother met them at the door with a telegram.

"I've been looking all over for you," she said. "Lookt This just came. It was delayed."

Joe read the message aloud.

" 'Arriving four o'clock train. Have boys meet me at station.' "

"Aunt Gertrude!" yelled Frank. "And here it is cen minutes past four."

The message was indeed from their Aunt Gertrude, a peppery and dictatorial lady who had a habit of dropping in at Bayport unexpectedly for long visits with her brother's family.

Just as Frank and Joe were her favorite nephews, so Aunt Gertrude was the Hardy boys' favorite relative; but they had long since learned that when Aunt Gertrude expected to be met at the station, she expected to be met. And it would take plenty of explaining if she found no one there to welcome her-especially after she had gone to the trouble of sending a telegram.

Curse of the Caribbees 7

"Oh, gee, I hope the train is late!" said Frank, wheeling out the door.

"Hurry!" urged Mrs. Hardy. "You know what Aunt Gertrude is like when things don't work out as she plans them."

"You're telling us!" laughed Joe as he raced down the steps after his brother.

Mr. Hardy had taken his car, and since the boys' own car was laid up, they had to go downtown by bus. They were lucky enough to board a station-bound one at the corner, but their hopes that the train might be late were doomed to disappointment.

When they hurried into the waiting room, the first person they saw was Aunt Gertrude.

She was sitting grimly on a bench, surrounded by luggage, beating an impatient tattoo on the floor with her umbrella.

She was a tall, somewhat portly woman of uncertain years, with an eye that missed nothing. Behind her forbidding manner, the boys knew there was a, warm heart, a good deal of affection, and even a certain amount of quiet humor. But those who did not know Aunt Gertrude just naturally regarded her as a terror.

"Well!" barked the lady as her nephews approached sheepishly. She brandished the umbrella, pointing it at the waiting-room clock. "Does that look like four o'clock?"

"We're awfully sorry, Aunty," said Joe meekly, "but the fact is-----"

8 The Melted Coins "The fact is, I took the trouble to send a telegram asking you to meet me at four o'clock, and here it

is past four-thirty. The fact is, I 've been left sitting here in this horrible waiting room wondering what to do with myself.

"And the fact is," continued Aunt Gertrude, bringing the umbrella down on the floor with an emphatic whack that made the boys jump, "the fact is, I've been robbed!"

CHAPTER H

chet's buried treasureb

" bobbed?" exclaimed Frank.

"You heard me. That's what I said. Robbed. It's an outrage."

"You mean someone stole your purse, Aunt Gertrude?" asked Frank.

" Only over my dead body could anyone steal my purse," declared his relative, taking a firm grip on the huge handbag she always carried. "But I was robbed just the same. I'm going to the police!"

One thought quickly flashed through the minds of Frank and Joe. Was the person who had robbed their aunt the same one who had attacked the victim in the hospital?

The boys, though young, had had a good bit of training in detective work under the guidance of their famous father. For years Fenton Hardy had been in the service of the New York City Police Department. His work became so noted that people from all parts of the

country called upon him for help. Consequently he retired from the Department and established his own practice as a private detective.

The Hardys now lived in Bayport, a pleasant city of about fifty thousand people, on Barmet p

10 The Melted Coins Bay. Here Frank and Joe had spent their boyhood. Frank, dark-haired and dark-eyed, was a year

older than his merry, blond brother.

Their ambition was to become private detectives, and this ambition was backed up by ability. In "The Tower Treasure," the Hardy boys handled their first case—a mystery involving the disappearance of a valuable stamp collection. Their success led to other cases, and only recently they had become involved in "The Flickering Torch Mystery," a strange affair arising from the appearance of a weird, hooded figure on a lonely cliff. At the present moment they wondered if Aunt Gertrude's robbery story would prove to be another case for them.

"What did you lose?" Frank asked her.

"I didn't lose anything. Newsboy on the train changed a five-dollar bill when I bought some fruit."

"Did he short-change you?" Joe asked impatiently. He wished that his aunt would hurry up and explain.

"He gave me my exact change. I counted it. But now," Aunt Gertrude's voice became shrill with indignation, "now I find that some of the money isn't any good."

"Counterfeit?" gulped Joe incredulously.

The idea that anyone could outwit his aunt in any money transaction was so fantastic that he could not believe it.

"Bogus! Every quarter and every half Chet's Buried Treasure
11

dollar of it. Counterfeit money." Aunt Gertrude dug into her huge bag and fished out several coins. "Look at them! I can't imagine how I let myself be fooled like that."

To the boys, the quarters and half dollars looked authentic. If they were counterfeits, they certainly were very cleverly made.

"I'm going to report this to the police!" declared Aunt Gertrude firmly. "Nobody can swindle me out of any money and get away with it."

At that moment an old man with dark glasses, who had been standing near by evidently waiting for an outgoing train, shuffled forward.

"Did I hear you say you had some counterfeit money, lady?" he inquired in a cracked voice.

"And what if I did?" demanded the woman, bristling.

Any stranger who spoke to Aunt Gertrude did so at his peril, especially if she were angry. The newcomer was not at all taken back by the other's hostile attitude, however.

"I'd like to buy 'em," he said. "I'm a coin collector. Some bogus money would be a novelty. Give you a dime for each one."

Aunt Gertrude snorted with indignation. She glared at the old man.

"Think I don't know it's against the law to pass counterfeit money?" she barked. "I could get about five years in prison for selling a bad quarter."

12 The Melted Coins "Oh, lady," continued the old man in a wheedling voice, "I wouldn't tell anyone. Come on.

I'll give you fifteen cents for each one of them."

"I'll neither sell you one nor give you one," snapped Aunt Gertrude tartly. "I shall turn them over to my brother Fenton Hardy. He's a detective and he'll go after the men who made them."

The old man blinked through his spectacles and turned away hastily. He picked up his valise and shuffled out of the waiting room without a backward look.

"Come on!" said Aunt Gertrude to her nephews. "Let's get out of here. I've been in this waiting room long enough. Carry my bags. Call a taxi."

"How did you discover that the coins were counterfeit, Aunt Gertrude?" asked Joe curiously, when they were seated in the cab.

His aunt gave him a sharp look. "I've handled enough of them in my life to know," she retorted mysteriously.

The Hardy boys were astonished. That any past chapter of their aunt's life could have involved her to any great extent with counterfeit money seemed highly unlikely. The boys wondered if their relative had some secret she was keeping from them. She did not explain further, but changed the subject abruptly. Soon the taxi arrived in front of the Hardy home.

Chet's Buried Treasure 13

There was always great excitement and confusion whenever Aunt Gertrude made her entrance. This time was no exception. She permitted herself to be kissed by Mrs. Hardy, then strode into the living room where she immediately rearranged a couple of pictures, shifted an easy chair to

another position, and straightened a rug. During all this time she kept up a running fire of conversation.

"Take my bags upstairs. . . . You, Joe, what did you do with my purse? . . . Laura, those curtains ought to be pushed back to let the sun in. ... And where is Fenton? That man is never at home when I arrive."

Luckily, Fenton Hardy walked in the front door at that moment. He kissed his sister, and explained that he had returned home just a few moments after Frank and Joe had set out to meet her at the station.

"Then why didn't you stay at home? Don't tell me you went down to the station, too."

" No," laughed the detective. " The boys had left a message asking me to run over to City Hospital, so I thought I could get there and be back before you came in."

"Oh, I see," she said.

"Did you see the mystery man?" asked Frank.

" Who is he, Dad ? One of your clients ?" Joe inquired excitedly.

Fenton Hardy shook his head. "Never saw him before. He's a total stranger to me."

14 The Melted Coins "Then why did he mutter the words 'Hardy' and 'Elm?' " asked Frank, mystified.

"He may have been on his way here to consult me. We 'll have to wait until he's conscious before we can find out. However, he may not pull through."

The case was explained briefly to the women, then Joe said, "Aunt Gertrude has a mystery of her own. She's an expert on counterfeit coins, and has some to show you," he added impishly.

His relative gave the boy a withering look. Nevertheless, she took a quarter from her purse and handed it to her brother. After the detective had examined it closely, he looked at his sister admiringly.

"You're right, Gertrude," he said. "And most of the tests for counterfeits would fail on this coin, it's so cleverly done."

"You mean biting the money to see if it's soft, or dropping it to hear its ring?" asked Frank.

"Exactly," replied his father. "Even the weight wouldn't be noticed by most people. This piece does not contain twenty-five cents worth of silver, I'm sure. Probably it's made of some cheap metal with a thin coating of silver over it. I believe I'll run down to Washington to report this."

Aunt Gertrude gave her brother the rest of the coins, and then hurried upstairs.

"I'm going to get a little rest," she announced Chet's Buried Treasure 15

from the landing. "Frank and Joe, don't you make any noise!"

At that moment the doorbell rang, so she waited to see who was calling. Before anyone could answer the ring, in walked a chubby, red-cheeked youth who appeared to be bursting

out of his clothes at every seam. He was munching a banana.

"H'ya, Mrs. Hardy. H'ya, Aunt Gertrude. Afternoon, Mr. Hardy," he greeted. Then, beckoning mysteriously to Frank and Joe, he disappeared into the kitchen. "Come out here, fellows. I have something exciting to tell you," he called.

Chet Morton's appearances were of ten made in this casual and unexpected fashion.

He was a close chum of the Hardy boys and lived in a rambling old farmhouse on the outskirts of the city. When the brothers followed him to the kitchen, they found him stuffing the last of the banana into his mouth and reaching into a cookie jar on the table.

"Do you know," said Chet placidly, "I've never been so excited in all my life."

Frank and Joe had rarely seen Chet Morton excited about anything.

"What happened? Rich uncle die and leave you a pie factory?" laughed Joe.

"This is no laughing matter." Chet bit into a cookie and winked mysteriously. "This is big stuff, I'm telling you." Then he lowered his - -a*

16 The Melted Coins voice and said in a loud whisper, "How would you two like to share in a buried treasure?"

Frank and Joe stared at him.

"Are you kidding?" asked Frank.

"You heard me," repeated Chet Morton solemnly. "I said buried treasure 1"

CHAPTER III

THE PINE TREE SHILLING

chet fished in his pocket with a mysterious air. He took out his handkerchief, which was tied in innumerable knots.

"Do you mean to tell us you *Ve found* a buried treasure?" exclaimed Joe.

"Part of one. And I'm giving you fellows first chance at helping me locate the rest of it."

The fat boy was diligently untying the knots. Finally he produced a coin.

"Take a look at that!" he said impressively.

Frank and Joe examined the money. It was old and tarnished, a flat piece of silver with a crude picture of a pine tree stamped on the surface. The Hardy boys could distinguish the words "In Masachusetts."

Frank turned the coin over, and read, "New England A. N. Dom.," the date 1681, and the numeral XII."

"Sixteen eighty-one!" exclaimed Frank. "Why, I didn't know they made coins in this country that long ago."

"That," declared Chet, "is a Pine Tree Shilling. The XII means twelve cents."

"You sure it isn't some old counterfeit?" asked Joe. He could not take his friend seriously.

18 The Melted Coins Chet looked hurt. "I stopped in the library on my way over here and looked it up in a book. This coin is rare and valuable."

The Hardy boys regarded their chum with respect. Although they were very fond of him, he was usually a source of amusement because he was seldom serious about anything in life except food. But here was Chet in a new role.

"Where did you get it?" asked Joe eagerly.

Chet tiptoed to the door, looked out to make sure no one was listening, and peeked through the window. Then he returned and whispered hoarsely: "Digging a ditch on our farm. Found it near the brook. I'm sure there must be more of them."

"A buried treasure, eh?" mused Frank.

"Why don't you two come back home with me and spend the night?" suggested Chet.

"Then in the morning we can really hunt for the treasure. I'll bet there's a sackful of coins

buried near the brook."

"We're with you!" declared Frank, and Joe nodded.

"We'll get up bright and early in the morning and dig every inch of that field. But don't tell anyone about that coin," begged the fat boy.

"Didn't you tell your folks?" asked Joe.

Chet shook his head. "I was afraid they'd laugh at me. I'm waiting until we find the treasure. Then I'll surprise them."

They'll figure I'm kind of smart after all."

The Pine Tree Shilling 19

Chet took another handful of cookies-such a big handful, in fact, that his fist was trapped in the mouth of the jar. Beluctantly he had to drop several cookies before he could get free.

Then, with a finger to his lips in token of silence, he tiptoed out the kitchen door and trudged across the back yard.

"Wonders will never cease," said Frank, after he had gone. "Chet Morton finding buried treasure. I can't believe it."

"It's hard to believe Chet was digging a ditch in the first place," returned Joe. "That's Miracle Number One."

The Hardy boys laughed. Chet had never been known to be fond of labor. But the brothers took the buried treasure story seriously enough to make their excuses after dinner and set out for the Morton place with pajamas and toothbrushes. Aunt Gertrude gave them her usual quota of advice against catching cold and getting their feet wet, but agreed that a day at the farm might do them good.

Chet was waiting for the boys on the porch of the roomy old farmhouse. There was still daylight, and he suggested they go down to the brook and have a look at the place where he had found the ancient shilling.

"Let's go before Dad or Mother or lola have a chance to ask what we're doing," the fat boy urged. "If Joe sees lola, we'll never get down there."

Joe's face turned red. He made no secret of 20 The Melted Coins the fact that he thought Chet's sister a pretty nice girl.

But this time he followed his chum's suggestion and set off with the others.

Chet led the way to the field. His father had asked him to dig a drainage ditch to the brook, but apparently the stout youth's discovery of the early American coin had occurred at the first stage of the digging, for the ditch was neither deep nor long. Several spades and shovels lay about.

"Right here is where I found the money," said Chet, indicating with his toe a place near the end of the ditch.

Joe grabbed a spade. "Well, what are we waiting for ?" he said. " Might as well go after the rest of the treasure right now."

"That's what I say!" agreed the fat boy, seizing a shovel.

Frank also picked up a shovel, and in a few moments all three boys were working diligently. Chet, however, soon developed a kink in his side, or so he said.

" Guess I 'd better sit down for a minute. The pain'll pass off in a little while. But the doctor always warned me against violent exercise after eating."

Frank and Joe hardly noticed him. They were too busy digging-each with his eye peeled for the glint of a coin.

But after half an hour, Frank observed that Chet was still amiably inspecting their labors, though giving no indication of actually resuming work himself. He straightened up and rubbed his aching back.

ing work himself. He straightened up and rubbed his aching back.

"I've got an idea we're being gypped," Frank said quietly to Joe.

"How?"

"Chet had a job to do, digging this ditch. And now we're doing it for him."

"I thought we were digging for coins," said Joe, surprised.

"That's what we both thought."

Chet, sprawled leisurely beneath a near-by tree, called out, "What's the matter-getting tired already?"

"Seems to me *you* tired pretty quickly," grinned Frank.

"You forget, I've been digging all afternoon. And besides, I got a kink in my side. I'll take over in a minute. No coins yet, huh?"

The Hardys resumed their digging. The more Frank thought about it, the more he was convinced that the fat boy had invented the whole story as a means of gaining a little assistance with the job his father had assigned.

"I think we'd better quit," he whispered to Joe. "If we fall for this, Chet will think it's a great joke. He'll tell the story all over the city of Bayport."

"That's what I'm thinking. Let him dig his own ditch."

"One more shovelful and I'm through."

Frank thrust the spade into the ground, and turned the earth over. Then he uttered a cry of

22 The Melted Coins surprise. Something struck against the edge of the spade with a dull *clink* and tumbled off to one side.

"Found something?" asked Joe.

Frank dropped the spade and picked up the object he had unearthed. It was round and metallic, covered with grime. When he brushed it off, he saw that it was a coin.

"Don't tell me you've found one!" yelled Chet, scrambling up from his resting place beneath the tree. He hurried over, displaying more energy than he had shown all evening.

He and Joe crowded around Frank as he examined the coin in the twilight. He could discern a ship on one side, and on the back of the blackened piece a figure that looked like a pig.

"Let me see it. Let me see it," babbled Chet excitedly. "Jeepers, it *is* another. I was right. There's probably a fortune buried here somewhere if we can only find it. Let's keep digging!"

Frank eyed him suspiciously.

"Let *who* keep digging?"

"Why-all of us, of course."

"Haven't noticed you doing much digging tonight. Are you sure this coin isn't just bait, like the other one?"

"What do you mean?" asked Chet blankly.

"I wouldn't put it past you, Chet Morton, to plant a couple of old coins around here just to promote this ditch-digging job.

I'll bet I could The Pine Tree Shilling 23

dig here for a month before I'd find another. But your ditch would be finished."

"Why, Frank Hardy!" exclaimed Chet in an aggrieved voice. "Do you mean to say you think I would do a trick like that to my best friends f"

"I'm positive you would," declared Joe cheerfully.

"On my word of honor as a gentleman," fervently cried the stout youth, "I didn't have a thing to do with putting either of those coins there! For all I know, they might have been buried in this field a hundred years ago. And I'm sure there must be more of them.

"Gee whiz," he continued, shaking his head sadly, "it sure shakes my faith in human nature. To think my very best friends believe I'd do a thing like that. Although," he added thoughtfully, "it *would* be a smart way to get a ditch dug, come to think of it."

"It's too late to work any more tonight," Joe said. " Let's go up to the house."

"You'll help me again in the morning?" asked Chet anxiously. "Don't walk out on me now, fellows. I '11 dig just the same as you. Because now I *do* believe there's a treasure. I wasn't so sure when I found just one coin," he grinned.

The boys went up to the house where Mrs. Morton and lola provided a late snack,

consisting of sandwiches and a pitcher of ice-cold milk.

24 The Melted Coins "Hard work makes boys hungry," smiled Chet's mother.

"I've never noticed that it made much difference to my hard-working brother," teased lola.

For an hour there was joking and singing among the young people. Then the boys trooped up to bed. Tired from their exertions, they soon fell asleep.

They were up early the next morning, eager to get back to the treasure hunt. Frank had been dreaming of mountainous heaps of silver coins. Joe said he had imagined seeing a forest of pine trees with dollar bills growing from every branch. Chet said he had dreamed of fifty thousand dollars' worth of ice cream. After breakfast he said they must hurry down to the brook.

"I never saw you so eager to work," said lola. " What's going on ! "

The boys looked a little guilty. Chet told his sister that they wanted to get the ditch dug before the sun became too hot. With that explanation, they ran off.

"We must have done a lot more digging than we thought!" exclaimed Frank, when they reached the field. "Why, the ditch is nearly finished."

"I don't remember digging any of those holes over near the tree!" declared Chet, puzzled. "And I'm sure you fellows didn't dig at that spot."

The boys stared. The spades were not where The Pine Tree
Shilling 25

they had left them. Frank and Joe had stacked the tools neatly beside the ditch. Now they were scattered carelessly in the upturned earth.

"Someone has been here!" cried Joe. "He was digging during the night!"

"And probably found the treasure!" groaned Chet in dismay.

CHAPTER IV

THE ISTTKTJDER

the boys looked at one another in consternation. The evidence was clear enough that someone had visited the place during the night.

"Maybe he saw us working here yesterday," Chet said dolefully. "Probably stole up and listened to us talking about the treasure."

"That's possible," Frank agreed. "Are you sure you didn't tell anyone else about it?"

"I didn't tell a soul," the fat boy declared, prowling up and down the ditch.

"Maybe the fellow who was digging here last night was the man who buried the treasure in the first place," Joe suggested. "That is-if there *was* a treasure."

"The man who buried those coins has probably been dead a couple of hundred years,"

scoffed Chet. "I'm sure his ghost didn't come back to dig them up."

"A thief may have stolen those coins along with some others," said Joe. "Perhaps he buried them here until it would be safe to come back and get them. In that case it wouldn't take him long to recover them, because he would know exactly where to hunt."

Frank shook his head doubtfully. "In that case, why did he dig an extra three feet of ditch?"

26

The Intruder 27

If he knew exactly where to go, he would have dug one hole, scooped up the treasure, and cleared out."

Chet scratched his head with a worried air. "I don't know what to make of it," he sighed.

"Gee whiz-just when I thought I had a fortune in my grasp!"

"Maybe the thief didn't find it," Frank said hopefully. "He might have been confused by all the digging that's been done. Perhaps that's why he went to work on the ditch and then dug all those other holes."

Chet brightened up at this possibility. "Do you think so ? Then let's start working again."

"All right," agreed Joe. "If we don't find anything, we can set up a camp near by and

watch the place tonight. If the person who was here didn't find the treasure, he'll probably be back."

Chet rubbed his hands in glee. "In that case, we can let him do all the digging until he finds it. Then we'll jump out and collar the treasure. We can save ourselves a lot of trouble. In fact, we don't need to work at all today."

"I'd rather find the money myself," said Frank energetically.

"What money?" called out a girl's voice.

"Did you lose some?" asked another.

The boys turned in surprise. Lola Morton and her chum Callie Shaw were standing only a few yards away. In the soft grass they had approached without making a sound. The girls 28 The Melted Coins burst into laughter at the astonished expressions on the faces of the three boys.

"Gracious, what's the matter?" asked Lola. "You all look as guilty as if you'd been caught robbing a bank."

"What's all this about money?" Callie wanted to know. "I thought you were supposed to be digging a ditch. Looks to me as if you've been trying to find a buried treasure."

"I-I-we were just talking about money," muttered Chet. He glared at his sister. "What brings you down here anyhow?"

"Don't worry, we're not going to bother you," said Lola. "We have a perfectly good reason for coming. There was a phone message for Frank and Joe, and we came down to deliver it."

"For us?" exclaimed Frank.

"Your mother just called. She wants you both to come home right away."

"Anything wrong?" asked Joe quickly.

"She didn't say. I thought her voice sounded a little shaky. But she just asked me to tell you to come home."

Frank handed his spade to Chet. "I guess you'll have to finish the ditch alone. Come on, Joe. Let's hurry."

"Aw, gee," moaned the fat boy. "Just when I thought I was going to have some help."

"We'll try to come back tonight," Joe promised, "if Mother doesn't need us."

"Tonight?" called Callie Shaw, puzzled.

The Intruder 29

«Why on earth would you come back here at night?"

Frank decided the girls were uncomfortably close to the secret about the buried treasure. If Callie and Lola realized there was more to this than the mere digging of a ditch, there would be no end to their questions.

"Maybe if Chet thinks we're not coming, he won't work," Frank smiled. "If we return, he'll be ashamed of himself unless that ditch is a good deal longer than it is now. Come on, Callie, I'll walk as far as the house with you."

Frank enjoyed Callie's company, and was sorry when he and Joe had to say good-bye.

The brothers headed for home at a brisk pace.

"I hope nothing has gone wrong," Frank said. "It's unusual for Mother to call up like that.

Wonder what's the matter?"

"Maybe they've found out something about the mystery man at the hospital."

"We'll soon know."

The boys made record time reaching Elm Street. They hurried into the house, and found their mother and Aunt Gertrude sitting in the living room. Aunt Gertrude was peering nervously through the curtains.

"What's up?" asked Joe. "We started home *as soon as we got your message.*"

"He's gone now," muttered their aunt strangely. "He disappeared around the corner *as soon as you came in sight.* You should have come in the back way."

30 The Melted Coins "Who's gone? Who disappeared around the corner?" her nephew inquired.

"A strange man," said Mrs. Hardy quietly. "I think he was watching this house."

Joe whistled. He wheeled toward the door.

"Come on, Frank. Let's find him and ask him why he's hanging around here. What does he look like, Mother?"

"No, don't go," directed Aunt Gertrude. "We don't want to be left alone."

"Where is Dad?" asked Frank.

"He flew to Washington early this morning," Mrs. Hardy told them. "He took down the counterfeit coins your Aunt Gertrude brought."

"I tell you there's more to this than meets the eye," declared the other woman grimly. "I think the man who was watching this house had something to do with those coins. Why else would he be here-except to shadow me?"

"But, Aunty, how do you know he was watching *this* house?" inquired Joe. "After all, maybe he was just waiting for someone."

"Waiting for fiddlesticks!" snapped Aunt Gertrude. "He had a mean, sinister expression and an evil light in his eye. That's how I know he was watching this house-and me. The moment I saw him I said to your mother, 'That man is up to no good.' He pretended he *wasn't* looking at the house, and that's exactly how I knew he *was* looking at it."

Aunt Gertrude glared at the boys trium-
The Intruder 31

phantly, as if defying them to dispute this logical explanation. Frank and Joe were not entirely satisfied. Their relative was given to strange flights of imagination, although ordinarily she was a practical soul and full of hard common sense.

"He was tall, and was wearing a gray suit and a little mustache," added Aunt Gertrude, as if that settled all doubts.

Frank and Joe went to the window. "We'll keep a lookout. If he comes back, we'll see what he's up to."

But the sinister stranger did not return, although Aunt Gertrude kept darting to the window with shrill cries of "There he is!" whenever a man came in sight on the street. By the time lunch was ready, the boys were almost convinced that the whole affair was a false alarm.

"I guess he won't be back," said Joe, as they sat down at the table.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that," declared Aunt Gertrude darkly. "After all-----"

She was interrupted by a noisy disturbance in the back yard. Angry shouts and the furious barking and snarling of dogs

broke the noonday peacefulness of Elm and High Streets. Aunt Gertrude leaped to her feet, sniffing battle.

"Now how did those dogs get into our yard?" she demanded. "I'll show them!" She stormed out through the kitchen.

Mrs. Hardy and the boys followed. Two dogs 32 The Melted Coins were fighting viciously, and two men, presumably the owners of the animals, were arguing heatedly and loudly.

"Your dog started it!" bellowed one.

"He didn't. It was *your* dog!" shouted the other man. "Now it's up to you to stop 'em."

"Stop 'em yourself!"

By the time Aunt Gertrude waded into the argument, the racket was tremendous. She broke up the fight in five seconds flat, simply by marching right at the dogs and bawling "Get out of this yard!" in such awe-inspiring tones that they promptly fled.

But the argument between the two men was not silenced so readily. Each claimed the other's dog had started the fight. The issue became more complicated when Aunt Gertrude turned on them and blamed both of them for letting their pets get loose. It was a good fifteen minutes before the men, properly humbled and full of apologies, left the Hardy garden.

"The idea! Fighting in our back yard!" sniffed Aunt Gertrude. "Now let's finish our lunch. I declare, some people have no sense."

Joe already had entered the house. He had barely reached the kitchen, when he heard a noise from the hallway-a noise as if someone had stumbled against a chair. It was followed by the sound of hurrying footsteps.

The boy ran to the front of the house just in time to see the figure of a man disappearing through the front door. It closed sharply.

CHAPTER V

THE MAN WHO LOST HIS MEMORY

joe raced toward the door crying, "Frank! Come quick!"

His brother rushed into the hall just as the younger boy reached the porch.

"What's the matter?"

"Burglar!" panted Joe, hustling down the front steps.

He had caught sight of a man running along the street. The fellow turned into a drive halfway down the block.

"There he goes!" Joe cried excitedly over his shoulder.

The boy raced in pursuit, with Frank close at his heels. They reached the place just in time to see their quarry jump a hedge and disappear behind a garage. When the boys came to the spot, the man was nowhere to be seen.

They scouted along the block, but the few minutes in which they had lost sight of the fugitive had been enough. The man had made good his escape.

"It's no use," Frank said finally. "He probably is blocks away by this time. Did you get a good look at him?"

"Not at his face," replied Joe. "But he had 33

34 The Melted Coins on a gray suit and was tall, so I guess Aunt Gertrude was right about the fellow who was watching the house."

"We'd better get back there and see if he did any damage!"

The boys hurried home, where they found their Aunt Gertrude in a state of great agitation. She was saying that it was Mrs. Hardy who was upset, however!

"Now keep calm, Laura," the woman was imploring. "You mustn't be frightened."

Aunt Gertrude was fanning herself vigorously with the morning newspaper.

"I *am* calm," said Mrs. Hardy, who was not half so perturbed as her relative. "You're the one who is flustered."

"Me? Flustered? Not a bit of it." In her agitation Aunt Gertrude began fanning Joe instead of herself. "I'm as cool as a cucumber. Oh, my goodness, to think there was a burglar walking around in this house and we didn't even suspect it!"

"Did he steal anything!" asked Frank.

Mrs. Hardy said she did not know. She had not had time to look around. Aunt Gertrude suddenly thought of her purse, which she said she had left in a bureau in her room. With a cry she bounded up the stairs.

The purse was untouched-probably because Aunt Gertrude had taken the precaution to hide it under the mattress instead of in a bureau drawer. But Mrs. Hardy's purse, which had

The Man Who Lost His Memory 35

been lying on a living room table, had been opened and ransacked. Fortunately, it had held only three or four dollars. Nothing else was missing.

"I can't understand it," said the boys' mother. "You wouldn't think a thief would take such chances for the sake of a few dollars. There wasn't enough money in the house to warrant such a bold burglary."

"I have an idea," Frank said. "The man was probably the one who was watching the house this morning. The moment we went into the back yard to stop that dog fight, he saw his chance and slipped in by the front door."

"But how would he know about the dog fight? How did he know we would be out of the house?" asked Mrs. Hardy.

"I think that uproar was staged on purpose," said Frank.

"You mean the other two men were accomplices of his? They started the argument with the idea of getting us out of the house, so the other fellow could get in and burglarize the place!" exclaimed his mother.

"Doesn't it sound reasonable?"

"It seems like a lot of trouble for the sake of a few dollars," objected Mrs. Hardy. "But maybe he thought there was a great deal of money here."

The Hardys returned to their interrupted lunch. All through the meal they discussed the disturbing experience. Finally Frank said: 36 The Melted Coins "I believe Aunt Gertrude was right this morning. That fellow was after her counterfeit coins."

Joe blinked. "What in the world would a thief want with *counterfeit* coins? Eeal money -yes. But no thief would run risks to steal money he knew was no good."

"He might, if he had counterfeited them in the first place, and was afraid they would land him in jail."

Joe began to see light. "I think you've got something there. If he knew Aunt Gertrude had turned those coins over to Dad, he might have become frightened and decided to try to get them back."

"The evidence is safe in Washington by now, so he had all his trouble for nothing," said Mrs. Hardy.

Just then the telephone rang and Frank answered it.

"This is the superintendent at City Hospital, " said a man's voice. " About that patient you visited yesterday-the one who was beaten up. I promised your father I'd call you if there was a change in his condition."

"Is he worse?" asked Frank.

"No. In fact, he's conscious now. You can talk to him if you want to come over."

"We'll be there in ten minutes," promised Frank. Eeturning to the dining room, he said, "Come along, Joe. Our mystery "man has regained consciousness."

The Man Who Lost His Memory 31

When the boys reached the hospital, they found the patient conscious and sufficiently recovered to talk. But they were disappointed when they learned that the man was unable to give them the slightest clue to his identity.

"Amnesia," whispered the nurse as they stood at the bedside. "The poor man has lost his memory."

The patient looked at them blankly. "Who are you?" he asked in a weak voice with a decided Spanish accent. "I have not seen you boys before, have I?"

"When you were brought in here," said Frank, "you said something about Hardy and Elm. Well, our name is Hardy and we live at Elm and High Streets. The authorities thought you might be a friend of ours. We came over to see you yesterday, but we weren't of much help because we didn't know you."

"Hardy? Elm Street?" repeated the man, puzzled. He shook his head. "It means nothing to me. I am sorry."

"Can't you remember where you were going when you were injured? Were you on your way to our house?"

"I am sorry. I do not know."

"What is your name?"

The man shook his head again. "I am not able to remember anything," he muttered.

"Not even my name."

The nurse spoke up. "It's no use," she said. "His memory may come back after a 38 The Melted Coins while, but the doctor says it's a straight case of amnesia. He really isn't able to tell you anything."

She left the room. Frank leaned toward the bed, and looked straight at the stranger.

"Perhaps this will help you," he spoke softly to the patient. "There were a few other words you said yesterday. You muttered something about the *Curse of the Caribbees*.

Does that mean anything to you?"

The man's eyes flashed. An indescribable expression of fear crossed his face.

CHAPTER VI

MYSTERY AT MORTON FARM

Frank *was* sure the shot had hit home.

"*The Curse of the Caribbees?*" asked the man sharply, raising his head a little from the pillow. Then he slumped back. His face became expressionless again, and his eyes lost their momentary gleam of panic. He shook his head dully. "Never have I heard of it."

The boys decided there was nothing to be gained by questioning the mysterious patient any further. But on their way out they located the nurse, and suggested that she keep a careful watch over the man.

"Somehow," said Frank with a smile, "I think 'Mr. Spanish's' amnesia may not be so bad as it seems."

When the boys reached the street, Joe asked his brother, "Do you think he's faking?"

"That remark about the *Curse of the Caribbees* seemed to upset him, didn't it? If he has really lost his memory, it shouldn't have bothered him at all. I'll bet he's afraid of someone."

"He looked scared to me. Maybe that expression means so much to him that it's one of the few things he hasn't forgotten."

40 The Melted Coins "I think we ought to tell Chief Collig about this."

They went down to Bayport headquarters and asked to see the officer. When he heard their story, he frowned.

"The fellow *might* be faking," Collig admitted, "although I was talking to one of the doctors at the hospital, and he seemed pretty sure the amnesia was genuine. In any case, that doesn't mean the man isn't a crook. I'd better have a guard stationed near his room."

"And if he isn't a crook, he may need protection," suggested Joe. "The fellows who beat him up may try the same stunt again."

"He's a mystery man, sure enough," declared the chief. "He'll bear watching."

He thanked the boys for their information and summoned one of his detectives. The Hardys left and headed for home, discussing the strange case on the way.

They had watched the man's face closely when he had been told their name, but they were sure it had aroused no response. Why had he come to Bayport, and why had he mentioned the words "Hardy" and "Elm?"

A surprise awaited the brothers when they reached their house. Fenton Hardy was home. He was in the living room, listening to a highly dramatic account of the burglary as related by Aunt Gertrude.

"Looted the place in broad daylight, mind you!" she declared. "And it's a good thing Mystery at Morton Farm 41

if *was* daylight, too. If it had been at night, we 'all might have been murdered in our beds!"

"What did the thief take?" asked the detective, frowning.

"Apparently nothing but a little money," replied Mrs. Hardy. "I still can't understand why he came here."

The boys' father suddenly arose from his chair and left the room.

"I believe I know what the fellow was after," he said, "and maybe he got it."

The detective went into his study. Taking a small key from his pocket, he opened his desk and drew out a drawer. Then he pressed a concealed spring. The drawer had a false back which slid away, revealing a secret hiding place behind it. He looked inside, then

closed the desk.

"The other counterfeit coins are still here," Mr. Hardy smiled, returning to the living room.

"You didn't take all of them with you?" asked Joe in surprise.

"Suppose I had been held up, or lost the fake money? All my evidence would have been gone," the detective chuckled. "I didn't think any thief could find this hiding place. But I feel reasonably sure that's what the intruder was looking for just the same."

Mr. Hardy picked up one of the quarters and examined it.

"A very good imitation," Ee remarked. "The men down in Washington hadn't seen 42 The Melted Coins any quite like

these before. They said the coins are about the best fakes they have come across. They sent their thanks to you, Gertrude, and wondered how you detected the counterfeits so easily."

His sister sniffed, tossed her head, and said, "Hmph. A body would think I didn't have any brains at all."

She bustled out of the room, but her nephews thought she smiled mysteriously as she went upstairs. They looked at each other. Both recalled Aunt Gertrude's strange remark on the way home from the station when she had been asked how she knew the coins were counterfeit. "I've handled enough of them in my life to know." Did the lady have some secret she was keeping to herself?

"Sometime, boys," remarked Mr. Hardy, "I want you to see the wonderful collection of coins that are on display in Washington."

"I wish I knew more about old money right now," said Frank, thinking of Chet's treasure.

"When were the first pieces made, Dad?"

"The experts say the first ones appeared in Asia Minor, away back about 750 b.c. The Chinese, too, had metal money long, long ago. They were clever at testing it to keep from being cheated. They could tell if a coin was genuine merely by holding it between the thumb and first finger."

"Speaking of the Chinese," remarked Joe, "we have someone right here in Bayport who

Mystery at Morton Farm 43

is pretty clever on that subject. You know whom I mean. Old Wu Sing."

"That's right," agreed his father. "I recall he gave the police a clue that helped them solve a bank mystery a couple of years ago. He has a nice collection of old money."

"Let's look at it on our way back to Chet's," suggested Frank to his brother with a wink.

He was thinking of Chet's coins. "It's all right to go to Mortons now, isn't it, Dad!"

"Yes. But before you go, how about doing a little work in the garden here? Grass, weeds—you know how it is."

"All right," the two sons promised, and Frank added, "We can't be detectives every minute, I suppose."

"But nothing else is so much fun or so exciting," Joe declared.

Before they went outside, the boys told their father of the latest developments in the case of the amnesia patient whom Frank had nicknamed "Mr. Spanish." Mr. Hardy said he would take a trip over to the hospital to talk to the strange man.

"Oh, I almost forgot to tell you," he smiled. "The official I saw in Washington asked me to tell you boys to keep your eyes open. Maybe you can land some counterfeiters!"

"You bet we will," said Frank, and Joe nodded. "Nothing would suit us better."

Weeds in the flower and vegetable gardens were more numerous than the boys had sus—

44 The Melted Coins pected, and it was six o'clock before their job was done. As soon as dinner was over, they set out for the Mortons without stopping at Wu Sing's to see his collection. It was nearly dark when they reached the farmhouse. lola met them at the door.

" Can you imagine it!" she exclaimed. " Chet loves that old ditch so much he's actually

sleeping down there. "We can't understand it. He set up a tent under the trees this evening.

He's expecting you. I suppose you'll sleep there too!"

"We'll go right down."

"Something strange has happened to that boy," said lola, mystified. "Usually he hates work so much that he can't be induced to go near it. Now he's actually camping beside it!"

The Hardy boys gave no explanation. In a few minutes they said good night to lola and went down across the fields toward the brook. There was no light in evidence, but in the rays of the moon they could see the gray shape of a tent which had been set up under the trees.

"Chet must have gone to bed early," Frank remarked quietly.

"He probably dug a whole square yard of ditch today and is exhausted," laughed Joe.

"Let's steal up and surprise him."

They moved forward silently through the soft grass. As they came closer to the brook, they heard a surprising sound. It was a sharp Mystery at Morton Farm 45

ring of metal, as if a spade had clattered against a rock.

"Don't tell me that Chet is still working!" whispered Joe incredulously. "I can't believe it!"

"Listen!"

They halted. In the silence of the night the brothers could hear unmistakable sounds of digging. Then, as their eyes became accustomed to the gloom, they could distinguish a figure near the ditch. It crouched, straightened up, then crouched again.

"What do you know about that!" gasped Joe. "Iola was right. There *is* something the matter with Chet. He's working at that ditch even in the dark!"

"Hey, Chet!" shouted Frank.

The Hardys hurried across the meadow. A slight rise in the ground hid the ditch from view for a moment. When the boys came over the top and ran down the slope, they could no longer see anyone around.

"Funny he didn't answer," remarked Joe.

"Maybe he didn't hear us. It's strange he isn't using a light."

When the brothers reached the spot a moment later, it was deserted. A spade lay beside the freshly-dug earth.

"Chet!" called out Frank again.

There was no answer.

"He's hiding from us," said Joe.

46 The Melted Coins "Why would he do that?"

The boys turned toward the tent, which was pitched a few yards away. Frank whipped a flashlight from his pocket as he thrust aside the flap and went in.

"Come on, Chet," he laughed. "We saw you working. No denying it. You-----"

The beam of the flashlight revealed a figure sprawled on the ground. Frank leaped forward.

Chet Morton lay there-unconscious 1

CHAPTER VH

WTJ SING

"GrET some water, Joe. Quick!"

Joe snatched up a small pail that was lying with Chet's camp equipment, and ran toward the brook. In the meantime Frank set about trying to revive their chum, who showed no outward sign of injury. In a few moments he began to groan.

When Joe dashed in with the pail of water, they splashed it in Chet's face and his eyes flew open. He sat up, spluttering and moaning dismally.

"What hit me?" he muttered, rubbing the back of his head.

"That's what Frank and I would like to know. We thought we heard you digging when we came across the field. But it must have been someone else. When we came in, we found you sprawled here-out cold."

"Somebody whammed me over the head," grunted Chet, as remembrance came back to him. He rubbed the base of his skull. "Feel that lump ? The guy must have socked me with a baseball bat."

"Who socked you!"

47

48 The Melted Coins Groggy, Chet shook his head. "I wish I knew. I was tired out from digging and I thought you fellows weren't coming, so I decided to rest for a minute. I must have fallen asleep.

When I woke up, I heard someone coming into the tent. I thought it was you and Joe. So I sat up and said, 'Well, it's about time you showed up,' and just then the roof seemed to fall in.

Whoever it was hit me the minute I spoke."

Chet struggled to his feet a little unsteadily. Then he sat down again.

"Maybe the fellow isn't far away," Joe said excitedly. "Probably he was the one outside when we came across the field. I'm going to hunt for him!"

"Be careful!" warned Chet. "He's likely to haul off and knock your brains out. Better let him go."

Joe paid no heed. He ran out past the ditch and headed toward the fence. In the moonlight he looked up and down a near-by lane and across the fields. There was no sign of movement. He crouched and put his ear to the ground, hoping to hear the sound of running footsteps. But the mysterious stranger had lost no tune in making himself scarce. In disgust Joe returned to the others.

"No luck," he reported. "Let's look around and see what he was up to."

Undoubtedly the man had been digging.

Wu Sing 49

There was a deep, fresh, hole at the edge of the ditch.

"I'm sure someone buried loot here and came back for it," decided Frank. "The question is-was he successful or wasn't he?"

"Judging by the size of that hole, I think he knew exactly where to dig this time," Joe remarked. "It must have been mighty important to him, too, to warrant slugging Chet."

"He wasn't fooling," observed the fat boy ruefully. " He really meant to put me to sleep so he could work."

"I wonder if the pine Tree coin and the other one we found were part of the loot the man was looking for," said Frank slowly. "Or were they just silver pieces dropped here long ago by some farmer or traveler?"

Chet had other ideas, but he said nothing.

"One thing seems sure," Joe remarked after the Hardys had discussed the affair pro and con. "If the crook was frightened away before he found what he was hunting for, he'll probably be back. I think we ought to take turns standing guard here for the rest of the night."

The others agreed that this was a sound idea.

"If he should return, the one who is on guard can warn the other two and we'll all tackle him," said Frank. "I'll take the first turn if you like." He looked at his watch. "It's nearly eleven o'clock now. If the man is going to come at all, it will be during the night. Let's keep a lookout until one."

"Then wake me and I'll take over until three o'clock," offered Joe. "Chet can stand guard until five."

"Suits me," agreed the fat boy. "I'm glad I don't have first watch. I'm still half silly from that rap on the head. I crave sleep right now, and plenty of it."

Chet and Joe returned to the tent, while Frank took up his vigil in the shadows under a tree. By one o'clock, when Joe took over, there had been no sign of the stranger's return; nor had anything occurred to disturb his watch by the time Chet was aroused and dragged out, protesting sleepily. At sunrise he crept back into the tent.

"Just a waste of time," he muttered. "That guy probably got my treasure and now I'll never find it, worse luck."

Early in the morning, before they went up to the farmhouse for breakfast, the boys explored the ground about the ditch. In the freshly-turned earth they found a man's footprints leading toward the fence by the lane. They followed the tracks farther and were able to make them out for several hundred yards. They vanished at the main road. Tire marks told the rest of the story.

"The man had a car parked here. After we disturbed his digging, he climbed the fence, ran

Wu Sing 51

this far, and then drove off," Frank explained.

"And took my treasure," said Chet gloomily. "I feel it in my bones. He beat us to it."

The Hardys did their best to cheer up their chum, but Chet was firmly convinced that all his dreams of buried treasure might as well be forgotten.

"I'm going to take an impression of these footprints," declared Frank, "and stop at police headquarters with them. Maybe Chief Collig will recognize them."

"Guess I 'll stay here," said Joe. "Chet and I will work some more. You go on home.

We'll let you know if anything turns up."

"I think I'll run in to see Wu Sing while I'm in town," said Frank. "Let me have the two coins, Chet. The Chinese may be able to give us some help with this mystery."

Chet handed over the silver pieces.

"Don't say where they were found," he warned. "If that news should get out, everyone in the city will be up here digging like mad."

"It would be a good story to circulate, if you should want to get a garden dug in a hurry,"

grinned Joe.

After breakfast, Frank returned to Bayport. At police headquarters he was disappointed. There was no record of any footprints like those which the boy showed the chief.

"Working on another case?" asked the officer, smiling-52
The Melted Coins "Sort of," replied Frank, and hurried away.

He found Wu Sing, a gentle, elderly Chinese merchant, in an office at the rear of his shop. The old man beamed with pleasure when the boy came in.

"You come to see Wu Sing? This is great pleasure," he said, bowing. "You come sit down, please."

"Wu Sing, you know a good deal about coins," said Frank. "That's why I've called to see you."

The Chinese shrugged deprecatingly. "There is much to know about them," he said. " I know a little. Very little. But if I can help you, I will be glad."

Frank took the two silver pieces from his pocket and handed them over.

"Do you think these are genuine?" he asked.

Wu Sing put the coins in his palm and examined them carefully. Then he took them over to the window and looked at them in the sunlight.

"Yes," he said quietly. "Very rare. Early American Pine Tree Shilling, this one. The other-I shall have to look."

He pulled a catalogue from a drawer and thumbed through it.

"Here is picture. Coin was made at Hog Island about 1620. It is called Hog Coin."

"Where is Hog Island?" asked Frank.

Wu Sing 53

"Now we call it Bermuda. Once the wild hogs roamed the place. It could not have been so beautiful as today. May I ask where you got these coins?"

"They were found in a field near Bayport," Frank explained. " I 'm not sure, but there may have been more of them. We thought perhaps they had been stolen."

"If stolen," said Wu Sing, examining the pieces again, "then I think thief stole them from numismatist."

"From a coin collector?"

"No one else likely to have such rare ones as these. If someone lose collection of early American coins, then maybe these are clues of value."

"You collect coins yourself, Wu Sing?" asked the Hardy boy.

The Chinese shook his head. "I study coina but I collect only Chinese pieces. Mr. Carter here °b Bayport has good coin collection. Also Doctor Wakefield. Maybe if you ask them, they help you."

" That's a good idea," Frank declared. " I '11 go and see Mr. Carter first. He lives near here."

Wu Sing examined the coins carefully again, then returned them to the boy.

" Most interesting. Fine specimens," he said. "A story behind their discovery, no doubt?" His eyes twinkled.

54 The Melted Coins "111 tell you all about it *as soon as I* can, Wu Sing," said Frank. "In the meantime, watch your own collection carefully. Don't let anybody steal it."

CHAPTER VIII

THE TATTOOED HEAD

"No, my collection is safe, thank goodness," declared Phineas Carter when Frank called on him.

He was a jolly, red-faced business man who had retired and now lived quietly. When the Hardy boy showed him the two early American coins, he was tremendously interested, and offered to buy them on the spot.

"I'll give you a good price for them. I'd like to have them for my collection."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Carter, but they're not for Sale. I thought possibly they had been stolen from a private collection."

"So now you 're trying to find a coin collector who has been robbed, eh? That's reversing the usual procedure. Well, I'm glad to say my pieces haven't been touched. There was a, Stranger around yesterday, though, who wanted to see them. Queer-looking old duck."

"An elderly man wearing dark spectacles?" asked Frank eagerly.

"Why, yes. Do you know him?"

Thinking of the old man who had tried to buy one of the counterfeit coins from Aunt Gertrude in the railway station, the boy replied: 55

56 The Melted Coins "I don't know him exactly, but I did run across a person of that description who was interested in

coins. You say he was looking at your collection?"

" Said he might be interested in buying something from it, but I didn't have what he was looking for," returned Mr. Carter. "He told me his name was Batchy."

Frank thanked the collector and left the house. He was excited now. In again crossing the trail of the old man at the station, he wondered if he had uncovered an important lead.

"I'll go see Doctor Wakefield," the boy decided. "If Batchy has been to visit him, I'll know there's something in the wind."

Doctor Wakefield lived a few blocks away. He was a retired college professor, and coin collecting was his hobby. Stooped and gray-haired, he blinked at Frank over his spectacles when the youth announced the purpose of his call.

"It seems to me a number of people are interested in my little collection," he beamed.

"A man came around to look at my coins only yesterday."

"Is that so?" said Frank. "Did he want to buy any?"

"That's what he said. But I didn't have anything he wanted. He was an old fellow by the name of Batchy. You aren't buying coins, are you?"

"No. I have a couple of rare ones that were The Tattooed Head 57

found, and I thought they might have come from a collection. I was wondering if you had lost any."

"No," smiled the professor. "I was looking at them not ten minutes ago, and I am sure that every coin is in its proper place. I haven't lost any."

"I'm glad of that, Doctor Wakefield."

After Frank had seen the display and admired it, he asked how many coin collectors there were in the United States.

The professor smiled. "Somewhere between ten and twenty thousand," he replied.

"Whew!" whistled Frank.

"I belong to a numismatic club," went on Doctor Wakefield. "The study of coins gives one a good knowledge of history, geography, and the customs of people. Some of the ancient rulers used to commemorate nearly everything they did by setting it forth on a new piece of money. One old Roman Emperor had ten thousand varieties issued!"

"He must have loved himself a great deal," laughed Frank. "If a person tried to collect those and nothing else, he'd need a museum to hold them all."

"One of our living kings has a hundred thousand rare coins," said the professor. "So you see my collection is very insignificant. I doubt that any thief would be interested in it. But if I should lose anything, I'll let you know."

Frank expressed his appreciation for the

The Melted Coins time given him, then went home. Aunt Gertrude wanted to know what was going on.

"I never saw such a family," she said. "In. and out, in and out all the time," she scolded.

"Your father won't be back for lunch, and your mother has gone to a club meeting. Never saw such a household for people gadding about all the time. I come here for a visit, and I might as well be in Siberia for all the attention I get."

Frank realized that this was just Aunt Gertrude's way of expressing extreme pleasure at the fact that she had been entrusted with the management of the household in Mrs. Hardy's absence. Privately, he knew she often wondered how the family got along without her during the periods when she was not visiting them.

At noontime Joe telephoned his brother and was told of Frank's recent adventure, including the story about the calls of the mysterious old man on the collectors.

"First, Mr. Ratchy wants to buy a counter^efeit coin," said Frank speaking in a low voice on the upstairs telephone. "Then he visits two coin collectors, looking for something they don't have!"

"Do you think that might have been an excuse to see how valuable the collections were?

He really didn't want to buy any of them?" asked Joe.

"Exactly. Well, I found out one thing. If The Tattooed Head 59

hose coins from the Morton field were stolen from a collection, they probably weren't stolen in Bayport, as Mr. Carter and Doctor Wakefield are the only two who own very many pieces."

Joe reported that he and Chet had unearthed nothing of value. Just then Frank heard his name called. He hung up the telephone and came downstairs. His mother, who had just returned from her club meeting, was in the living room opening her purse. Aunt Gertrude stood near by.

"I'm glad you're back, son," she smiled. "Will you do an errand for me?"

"Anything you like, Mother," said Frank promptly. Then he gasped as Mrs. Hardy took from her purse a large roll of bills. "Looks as if you've been to the bank."

"Looks as if I should go to the bank," declared Mrs. Hardy. "You know I'm treasurer of

the club. Today most of the members paid their annual dues and I'm simply swamped •with money," she laughed.

"The sooner it's out of this house, the better," declared Aunt Gertrude tartly. "It's an invitation to thieves to come in here and ransack the place."

"Don't worry, Gertrude, I haven't any intention of keeping it. It has to go to the bank *v& Mawling before closing time.*"

"Mawling?" exclaimed Frank in surprise.

60

The Melted Coins Mawling was a small village several miles from Bayport. "What's the matter with, the banks right here in the city f'

"Well, the club account has always been kept there because the first treasurer lived in Mawling, and it was more

convenient for her. After she retired, we didn't bother to transfer the account."

"All I can say," said Aunt Gertrude, "is that the sooner the money is safe in the Mawling bank, the better it will be for all of us. Why, there must be several hundred dollars in that roll."

" Frank can drive over as soon as we 've had lunch," decided Mrs. Hardy.

Her sister-in-law shrugged. " It seems to me that it wasn't so long ago a thief got in here during lunch hour."

The meal was eaten without any excitement, however, except that Aunt Gertrude kept getting up and going to the door every few minutes.

Despite this, she failed to see a sinister, furtive-eyed man who had slunk across the lawn. From a vantage point among some bushes underneath a window, he had been eavesdropping ever since Mrs. Hardy had entered the house. At last, with a grim smile on his face, he tiptoed away and climbed into a car parked by the curb some distance down the street.

Soon afterward Frank left the house with The Tattooed Head
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the money in his pocket. When he drove out of the garage ten minutes later, the other automobile drew away from the curb and started down the road in pursuit.

After leaving the outskirts of the city, Frank turned onto a road that led to the village of Mawling. In the rear-vision mirror he noticed the other car some distance behind, but paid it no particular attention. It did not occur to him that

there was anything significant in the fact that the machine behind neither gained on him nor lost ground the whole time.

A lonely side road offered a short cut to the village. Hardly had Frank left the main highway before he noticed that the other car was overtaking him. He pulled over to let it pass, but it came alongside, forcing him toward the ditch. Frank looked up in alarm.

Then he saw that the driver was masked!

A crash was imminent. The man had cut off the boy. Frank jammed on the brakes before he was forced into the ditch. At the same moment he flung open the door and jumped.

He had a pretty good idea of what the masked person was after-the thick roll of money he was taking to the bank in Mawling! Like a streak of lightning the boy leaped over the ditch, but just beyond it was a fence. He had nearly cleared this, when the man lunged forward and tackled him.

The struggle was brief. Frank fought vigorously, but his assailant was bigger and stronger.

62

The Melted Coins During the battle, the youth tried to pull off the mask to catch a glimpse of the other's face. It moved slightly to one side, but did not come off.

In the struggle Frank did rip open the front of the fellow's shirt. The boy had a glimpse of a strange design tattooed on the man's chest-a design in the crude likeness of a Spanish woman's head.

Then something struck him violently on the skull. As he pitched forward, everything went black.

Grinning evilly, the hold-up man went through the boy's pockets, and made his escape.

Frank was left lying on the ground.

CHAPTER IX

THE OLD MAN WITH THE DIMES

groaning, Frank opened his eyes. He sat tip and rubbed his aching head. Then, suddenly remembering what had happened, he clapped his hands to his pockets. The money his mother had given him was gone!

"That's bad," he thought. "But Chet's coins are here," the boy sighed, when he discovered them a moment later. "Glad the thief missed them."

Groggily, the lad pulled himself to his feet. He examined the tire marks in the dusty road.

The masked man had turned his car around and driven back toward the highway.

Frank got into his own automobile and followed. At the concrete the telltale marks were mixed with others, and there was no indication of the direction which the hold-up man had taken.

Without the club money, Frank realized there would be no use in going on to Mawling.

Sick at heart over the loss, he returned to Bayport. When Aunt Gertrude saw him coming in the front door, she uttered a cry of amazement.

"Here already! You must have driven a hundred miles an hour. Young man, you'll be arrested for speeding one of these days-----"

64 The Melted Coins "I know why hie came back," smiled Mrs. Hardy. Then she noticed her son's white face and stricken look. "Why, what's the matter, dear?" she asked anxiously. "You look rick."

"I am sick. I lost the money. Hold-up man forced me off the road and stole every bill.-"

The dejected boy trudged to the telephone and called Bayport Police Headquarters.

Dully, he reported the loss.

"That's too bad, Frank," said the desk sergeant. "I'll send out a call on the police radio.

Too bad you weren't able to get the fellow's license number. How much money did you lose?"

"Quite a bit-about five hundred dollars, I think. How much was it, Mother?" Prank asked.

" Not so much as that," she said sympathetically. " In fact, I thought that was why you had returned. After you left, I noticed I had made a mistake and hadn't given you the whole amount. You had only a hundred and fifty with you. The rest is here."

"Well, that's a break, anyway," said Frank, feeling better. "A hundred and fifty in small bills," he told the desk sergeant.

"We'll do the best we can to get it back," promised the officer. "Tell us what you know about the fellow."

The boy told of the strange tattoo mark on the thief's chest—a crude design of a Spanish woman's head.

The Old Man With the Dimes 65

"That's a good clue," the sergeant praised. "Well, we'll do our best."

As Frank turned to his mother and aunt, the latter said: "I shouldn't be surprised if the thief were the man who robbed this house yesterday.

Maybe the same one who was hanging around here in the morning."

"No, this fellow was much bigger and heavier," declared Frank. He glanced at the clock.

"Gee, I must have been out cold a long time. It's too late to go to the bank now."

He was glad to get to bed early, and he fell asleep at once. After a good rest he felt quite himself again.

Soon after breakfast the next morning Joe came in. He had no news to report from the Morton farm, but he whistled when he heard of his brother's mishap.

"You'd better go to the bank with me this morning," Frank grinned. "Guess I need a bodyguard."

"I'm ready. Gee, I'm glad the fellow didn't take Chet's coins. They can't be replaced. "

This time, on the drive to Mawling, Frank took no short cuts. He stayed on the main highway the entire distance.

"That was the most expensive short cut I ever took," he told Joe. "Most likely the kold-up wouldn't have happened at all if I'd kept to this road."

66 The Melted Coins "You're right, it was expensive. One hundred and fifty dollars is a lot of money. Mother can't afford to lose that much. I suppose she'll have to pay It ba k to the club."

" Since Mother is the treasurer, she probably is insured, but I'm not. I'm the one who's paying it back, because I was responsible," said Frank. "When we get to Mawling, I'll write a check on my own bank account. It's a good thing I have the money."

The brothers had earned substantial sums in the past as rewards for the cases they had succeeded in solving. They had been able to buy motorcycles for themselves, a car, and even their prized motorboat, *The Sleuth*, which had figured in several mysteries. The rest had gone into the bank. Frank was glad he had the money available now to make up his mother's loss, and was determined to shoulder the responsibility himself.

The boys drove into Mawling, and pulled up in front of the Trust Company. Going inside, they found there was just one customer at the window ahead of them-an old man.

"Wouldn't think there was so much money in all those dimes," he was chuckling, as the cashier handed him several twenty-dollar bills.

"It takes a good while to count such a lot," said the cashier. Before him, in neat paper-rolled stacks, were several hundred dimes. "I don't blame you for wanting to get rid of them."

The Old Man With the Dimes 67

"Folding money is easier to carry," cackled the old man. He thrust the bills into a wallet and turned away.

There was something oddly familiar about his voice. When the Hardy boys looked at his face intently, they were sure they recognized him.

He was the man who had tried to buy the counterfeit coins from Aunt Gertrude! But he was not wearing dark glasses. Was he also the person who had visited the coin collectors?

The old fellow was too absorbed in his money to pay the boys any attention. He thrust the wallet into his pocket and shuffled toward the door.

When he had gone outside, Frank stepped up to the window. The teller was busy putting away the stacks of dimes.

"That was a job, I must say," he remarked. "I've been counting tencent pieces here for the past quarter-hour. That man seemed to have a ton of them."

"Where did he get so many dimes?"

"Said he had been in charge of a children's entertainment somewhere," the clerk said. "I suppose the admission price was ten cents."

"Do you know the old man's name?" asked Joe eagerly.

The teller shook his head. "Never saw him before," he replied carelessly. " Now what cao I do for you chaps 1"

Frank deposited the money Mrs. Hardy had 68 The Melted Coins given him. He also wrote out a check from his own

account in a Bayport bank for the amount that had been stolen from him, and deposited that as well.

"It seems strange," Joe said, when the boys had left the bank and were driving toward home, "that every time we come across that old man, he is in some way connected with coins. I wish we had trailed him."

"If we ever see him again, let's do it."

Aunt Gertrude was much relieved when the boys reached home and reported that the

money had been safely banked. She said she had not drawn an easy breath since the boys had left the house.

Late that afternoon they set out on foot for the Morton farm. Chet, to their astonishment, was actually working.

"Thought I might as well do a little more digging to fill in the time," he explained defensively. "Who knows but that another coin may turn up?" He set aside his spade and sat down on the grass. "What's new?"

"Plenty," said Frank.

He told Chet of the hold-up and of their suspicions about the strange old man.

"I *knew* I should have gone along with you, Joe, instead of staying here all day!"

declared the fat boy. "You fellows have all the excitement! Say, did that hold-up man get my coins?"

The Old Man With the Dimes 69

"No, thank goodness," replied Frank, and handed over the Pine Tree Shilling and the Hog Coin.

He explained what Wu Sing had told him. Then the conversation turned back to the strange old man.

" Maybe that Batchy person was the one who was digging here," suggested Chet.

"Too old," said Joe. "He couldn't have run away as fast as that fellow did the other night."

"Then maybe it was the hold-up man who was here," offered Chet.

"Could be," said Frank. "Only if he were interested in old coins, why didn't he take yours when he had the chance?"

"Maybe he didn't find them," said Chet in defense of his own deductions.

The boys went on with their digging. In a little while Chet declared he was so hungry he could not lift a shovel, so the three boys went up to the house. Supper was not ready, but Chet found part of a pie in the ice box, and by eating it, managed to survive until Mrs. Morton had the meal on the table. Again lola wanted to know what the mystery was behind the boys'

unusual interest in the ditch-digging job.

"All in good time, young lady. All in good time," Chet informed his sister in a lordly manner. "Just be patient and everything will be revealed to you."

70 The Melted Coins "There certainly must be something behind it," smiled Mrs. Morton. "I'm sure it isn't fondness for

work on your part."

"I'm misjudged and unappreciated," sighed her son. "I work like a dog, digging from morning until night, and this is all the thanks I get."

That evening the boys went back to the field. They made their camp a little more comfortable, and then sat chatting under the trees.

Chet even tried a little more digging. There was a moment of great excitement when his spade struck a hard object, and he shrieked that he had unearthed a chest. It turned out, however, to be nothing more than a large, discarded can of rather recent make. It was empty.

"That's treasure-hunting for you," sighed the stout youth philosophically. "Just one disappointment after another."

Dusk had fallen. The boys were talking over who should stand guard first, when Joe suddenly grabbed Frank's arm and pointed in the direction of the lane.

"Someone coming," he whispered.

Then Frank saw a light—a wavering, bobbing light. It flickered out, then shone again, and moved steadily across the field. Beyond it they could see the vague shape of a shadowy figure.

"Great Scott!" squeaked Chet. "He's heading this way!"

CHAPTER X

"mr. spanish"

the boys watched.

The man with the flashlight walked so quietly that his footsteps made no sound in the soft grass. When he came close to the tent, Frank murmured: "Looking for someone?"

There was a startled gasp. The stranger swung around, turning the flashlight full on the three figures.

"Tarnation!" he grunted. "Why didn't you speak up before this? Almost scared the daylights out of me."

The boys laughed in relief, for they recognized the voice as that of Officer Con Riley of the Bayport police force.

"What on earth are you doing out here so far off your beat?" asked Joe.

"Looking for you fellows," said Riley. "Chief Collig sent me to find you. Wants to see you at headquarters. I went around to your house to get you, and your aunt said I'd likely find you at the Mortons'. At the house they told me you were down here."

"Chief Collig wants to see us? What for?"

71

72 The Melted Coins "How should I know?" muttered Riley. "All I was told is he wants to see you, and quick.

So you'd better come along."

"For a couple of guys who came out here to *help* me," complained Chet, "you two certainly can find a lot of reasons for quitting the job."

"We didn't find this one. It found us," chuckled Joe. "How do we get back to Bayport, Riley? Did you walk?"

"Got a car," said the patrolman. "When the chief says it's urgent, I don't walk. Come along. Make it snappy."

Inasmuch as Officer Riley's normal pace was about half a mile an hour, the boys smiled at these remarks. They followed him obediently, wondering what was behind the strange summons.

At Bayport Police Headquarters, Chief Collig was waiting for them. He called the boys into his private office.

"It's about that hold-up yesterday," he explained. "We picked up a few suspects, Frank, all with tattoos on their chests. I want you to take a look at them. Perhaps the man we're after is among them."

He led the boys downstairs to a room in the basement. At the far end of it was a raised platform, with a glare of electric lights overhead. Chief Collig signaled to an officer, who opened a door at one side of the platform.

Four men shuffled out in the custody of a sergeant. They blinked in the brilliance of the "Mr. Spanish" 73

lights. One looked defiantly at the group, another grinned sheepishly. A third definitely was frightened, and the fourth man scowled in a surly fashion. Frank studied them and their tattoo marks carefully. Finally he turned to Chief Collig and shook his head.

"The hold-up man was not any of these four," he said.
"Tattoo marks are different."

"Okay," returned the officer. "I didn't have much hope. We 'll keep trying." He called to the sergeant. "Turn the men loose, Sam."

The chief explained to the boys why he had sent for them in a hurry. "I really didn't ask for you, Joe, but as usual Riley got mixed up. We couldn't hold these suspects for long, because we haven't anything on them. That's why I wanted you to look at them tonight, Frank."

"Too bad they had to be brought in here for nothing," said Joe.

"Don't waste any sympathy on that bunch," the chief laughed. "They're all bad actors, the whole four. They've been in and out of jail several times. If none of them pulled that holdup job, it was only because he didn't happen to think of it!"

When the boys left the police station they decided that since it was still early enough to call at City Hospital, they would inquire about the amnesia victim, "Mr. Spanish." Mr. Hardy

had not found time to go, and the boys were curious to learn something about the victim's condition. At the desk, the attendant told them 74 The Melted Coins the mysterious patient had shown considerable improvement during the day.

"He still doesn't know his own name, though," she said. "Go upstairs and visit him if you like."

"Mr. Spanish" was sitting up in bed, obviously in much better condition than on their previous call. The nurse in charge of the floor said his health had taken a decided turn for the better.

"In fact, if it wasn't for his memory, I'd say he 'd be well enough to walk out of here tomorrow, " she added.

When the Hardys entered the man's room, he smiled pleasantly at them.

"You were here before," he said. "It is good of you to come to see me again. I wish you could help me find out who I am."

"I wish we could, 'Mr. Spanish-' " began Joe.

The man's eyebrows went up in polite astonishment. " What is it you call me-' Mr.

Spanish?' "

1' We had to give you some kind of a name," laughed Frank, "and because of your accent, we decided on 'Mr. Spanish.' You don't know where you 're from 1"

The patient shook his head sadly.

"Perhaps I shall never know. It is a terrible thing, this, to recall nothing of one's past.

Where I came from, how I came to be here-it is all a puzzle."

"Mr. Spanish" 75

"There was one thing we said to you last time we were here that you seemed to recognize," related Joe. " You later told us it meant nothing to you. Suppose we try it again.

The Curse of the Caribbees."

"Mr. Spanish" frowned thoughtfully. This time the boys were convinced that the man was making an honest effort to remember.

"The Curse of the Caribbees/" he repeated slowly. Finally he shook his head. " No. If it 'meant anything to me, I would tell you gladly.

But truly it awakens nothing in my memory.

Nothing at all."

" Maybe it will later," said Frank kindly.

Just then the nurse came in and informed the boys that the visiting period was over.

They promised "Mr. Spanish" that they would come to see him again as soon as they could.

" My opinion of him has changed," Frank told the nurse after they left the room. "He seems to be a gentleman, not a crook."

"You're right. And I'm sure I don't know what's to become of him," the woman said. "He's well enough to leave here any time, but where is he to go ? The superintendent was saying today that since he probably was on his way to see Mr. Hardy when he got hurt, perhaps you might take him. We're so crowded here just now-----"

When the hospital doors had closed behind the boys and they were going down the steps, Joe said: 76 The Melted Coins "Well, was that a hint or wasn't it?"

"It was more than a hint," laughed Frank. " Let's see what the folks think about it."

When the boys reached home, they found Mrs. Hardy and Aunt Gertrude in the living room talking with Mr. Hardy, who had returned a few minutes before.

"Just like I said," spoke up Aunt Gertrude at once, as the brothers walked in. "In and out.

In and out. I thought you two were staying at the Morton place tonight."

Joe explained that they had dropped in to talk over a proposition regarding the amnesia victim, and then would go back to Chet's.

" 'Mr. Spanish' is getting better," said Frank. "He doesn't know his name yet, and he hasn't regained his memory, but he's well enough to leave the hospital."

"Where in the world is he to go?" demanded Aunt Gertrude.

"We thought it might be a good idea to invite him to come here," said Joe.

Mrs. Hardy looked thoughtful. Fenton Hardy raised his eyebrows inquiringly. As for Aunt Gertrude, she promptly exploded.

" What's that ? Bring a crazy man to live in this house 1 Nonsense! I '11 take the first train out of Bayport."

"But he isn't crazy, Aunty," explained Joe. " The poor fellow has merely lost his memory."

"Practically the same thing," sniffed Aunt Gertrude. "I'd go crazy trying to remember "Mr. Spanish" 77

things. Well, all I have to say is this-if that man comes to this house, you boys will have to stay here and watch him. It wouldn't be fair to your mother or me to leave us alone with a crazy man. I'm taking no chances with strangers who don't even know who they are, where they come from, what time of day it is, or how high is up. Not me!"

She flounced from the room. The boys asked their father what he thought of the idea.

"I'm all for it," declared Fenton Hardy. "Quite aside from the fact that it would be a decent and generous thing to do, because the poor fellow is homeless and penniless in a strange country, I'd really like to know why 'Mr. Spanish' came to Bayport. If he is with us when his memory comes back to him-as it should eventually-then we'll know what was behind it all."

Mr. Hardy looked toward his wife, who smiled understandingly. "I'll be glad to have the poor man, if he'll stay with us," she said kindly.

"We'll bring him here tomorrow," spoke up Joe, and Frank nodded.

"But your Aunt Gertrude is right about you boys having to stay home," said Mr. Hardy. "

No more treasure digging."

Frank and Joe jumped. "Then you know?" they gasped, looking at their father.

The detective smiled. "I *didn't* know until you boys gave yourselves away. Just plain de-78 The Melted Coins duction. Point one: Chet Morton doesn't like physical exercise, so why in the world would he be working day and night?

"Point two: why would his two best friends want to camp out in a field day and night and work, unless they were hunting for something pretty important, like a buried treasure ?"

The boys looked admiringly at their father. No wonder he was one of the country's outstanding detectives!

" Gee, Dad, you 're wonderful!" said Joe. His face glowed.

Mrs. Hardy's eyes twinkled. " Have you just found that out, son ?" she asked him.

"Oh, no," replied Joe in embarrassment, "but I was thinking it wouldn't pay to try to keep a secret from Dad!"

"Surely your father hasn't guessed everything you are doing," said his mother in defense of her sons' keenness. " There is more to the mystery than you have admitted, isn't there?"

Frank and Joe looked at her gratefully.

"Even if we don't find a treasure, we think we may capture a thief one of these days,"

replied Frank. " A coin thief."

He told his parents what he and Joe suspected about the fellow who had knocked Chet Morton unconscious. It was Mr. Hardy's turn to look surprised.

" Good work," he praised them. " I hope you catch the man. Well, you boys had better go

"Mr. Spanish" 79

back to Mortons, or Chet may get into trouble. But tell him to find another pal to help him from now on. You '11 be needed here."

"To watch 'Mr. Spanish?' " said Frank, a questioning look in his eyes.

"Yes. I have to make a trip out West. A representative of a foreign government has

asked me to take a very interesting case. I suspect it may have something to do with melted coins. I '11 tell you about it."

CHAPTEB XI THE SECRET POCKET

frank and Joe settled themselves in chairs to hear their father's story.

"The man who asked me to handle the case for his government has been disturbed for some time over a certain situation," Mr. Hardy continued. " It seems that two years ago his country shipped thousands of gold coins to the United States in payment of certain debts."

" I thought gold was always shipped in bars," said Frank.

" Usually it is, yes," replied his father. " But trouble was brewing in that country, and the officials sent off the coins for fear they would be seized. Some of the shipment was in bullion, to be sure, but a lot of it was in coin."

"How was it packed?" asked Joe.

"In strong cases. The money was sent to the United States by boat. But a severe storm came up-----"

"And the boat sank?" asked Joe.

"The boat didn't sink. It was badly damaged, and put into Barmet Bay near here for repairs. The next day the captain decided to move the gold coins ashore for safe-keeping.

But when he gave the order, he found that the money had disappeared."

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"All of it?"

"The entire shipment had vanished completely. "What's more, none of the gold bars or coins have ever been found. It was thought at first that it would be merely a matter of time before there would be some clue. But from that day to this there hasn't been a trace of any of the gold," Mr. Hardy concluded.

"Maybe it was melted down and turned into United States coins," Joe suggested.

"I hardly think so. Gold money is too easy to spot, for there isn't much of it in circulation,"

his father replied. "But you give me an idea. Maybe the coins were melted, but for another reason. I believe I'll follow that lead while I'm out West.

" First I '11 fly to New York, though, to check on a couple of points, then I'll return here before going farther. Suppose you trot along now to Chet's and be home by lunchtime tomorrow. Then we'll drive over to the hospital together and get' Mr. Spanish.' "

Mr. Hardy would divulge no more of his case, so the boys followed his suggestion and left the house. Frank and Joe found their fat chum sound asleep in the tent near the brook.

"Hey, what kind of guard are you?" grinned Frank, poking his friend in the ribs.

"Whassa matter?"

Chet opened his eyes a moment, then closed them and rolled over. As he did so, he smashed a box of crackers which lay beside him.

82 The Melted Coins "Get up!" commanded Joe. "You've had a nice nap. You ought to take first watch."

"What for?" asked the stout hoy, yawning.

" To nab the thief who buried some loot here," Frank reminded him.

"Oh! That's right! High time you fellows got back," his friend grumbled.

Chet arose, picked up the crackers, and disappeared outside. The Hardys went to sleep, but later took turns awaiting the strange intruder. Throughout the night no one came near the spot.

"The thief probably won't return so long as we're here," suggested Chet. "I'm tired of this business anyway. Tonight I'm going to get a good rest in a bed."

" And leave us alone to catch the thief ?" Joe winked at Frank.

After his chum had been properly apologetic, the Hardy boy explained that he and his brother had to stay at home and watch " Mr, Spanish."

"Then I'll get Tony Prito here," said Chet. "I won't quit. I promise."

" That's the spirit," laughed Joe. " And let us know if anything happens."

The brothers went home. Their father had returned from New York, so after lunch the three set out for the hospital to call on "Mr. Spanish."

Mr. Hardy took along one of his suits for the man to replace the badly torn clothes he had been wearing when he was brought in. The The Secret Pocket 83

patient was politely grateful when the detective explained the object of their visit.

"It is most good of you," he said earnestly. "I have been wondering what I should do. It is a most awkward situation. But how can I repay you ? After all, / am a stranger to you. I have no money-----"

"We'll forget about that," smiled Fenton Hardy. " The main thing is for you to get well and have your memory restored.

You're welcome to come and stay at my home as long as you wish."

" But my clothes. When I was found lying in the street, they were muddy and torn. They have not been cleaned."

" I thought of that, and brought a suit of mine. You're just about the size to wear it. In the meantime, the boys will take yours to the tailor and have it cleaned and repaired."

It was decided that "Mr. Spanish" and Fenton Hardy would go directly home, while Frank and Joe would take the amnesia victim's suit downtown to be fixed.

"Hmm! This sure needs cleaning," commented the tailor a short time later, holding up the coat. " It will take a couple of days."

He deftly turned the pockets inside out to make sure nothing of value was in them. Chief Collig already had told the boys that "Mr. Spanish's" clothes had been thoroughly searched for clues as to his identity, and that none had been found. Frank and Joe were surprised, therefore, when the tailor pulled out something.

"Ha! What's this?"

He had turned an inner coat pocket inside out. There, in a second one, sewn within the first, he had felt a hard object. The man fumbled a moment, then extracted it.

"People nearly always leave something in a suit pocket, especially when it's one of the trick kind like this," he added.

The object he held up was a coin. A gold coin.

"Better take care of that," went on the tailor, handing it over to Frank. "Looks like a twenty-dollar gold piece."

The Hardy boys were careful to show no surprise, though they were amazed at the find.

"Thanks a lot," Frank said, taking the money. "The owner will be glad to get this back.

He probably forgot all about it."

The boys left the place. They waited until they were around the corner before they spoke. Then they halted and excitedly examined the gold piece.

"It isn't United States money," declared Joe. " Look! What do you suppose it is ? "

The coin was old. On one side was a date-1725. On the other was the likeness of a woman's face with a Spanish headdress. The only wording on the piece, a religious motto, also was in Spanish.

"It's very strange," said Joe.

"The woman's head!" exclaimed Frank.

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"It's the same as the one tattooed on the hold-up man's chest!"

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

The brothers looked at each other in astonishment. They realized that this coin, so well hidden in "Mr. Spanish's"

secret pocket, might prove to be a valuable clue to their mysterious guest's identity. But also, it might prove the man to be someone undesirable.

Was there a connection between him and the fellow with the curious tattooed design on his chest ?

"Let's take this coin over to Wu Sing," Frank suggested. "Perhaps he can identify it."

The Chinaman's place was only a few blocks away. The elderly man greeted the boys courteously.

"You have brought more coins perhaps?" he smiled. "I shall be glad to help my friends."

"Just one more, Wu Sing," replied Joe. "We've never seen anything like this piece.

Show it to him, Frank."

The boy handed the coin to him. Wu Sing took it over to the window and examined it carefully. Looking puzzled, he opened a drawer and removed a well-thumbed book. He turned page after page, comparing pictures of coins with the unusual gold piece.

"This is most strange," he mused. "Most strange. I have no record of such a coin as this."

86 The Melted Coins He held it deftly between his thumb and first finger. Then he dropped it on the counter and listened to its ring.

"It is genuine gold. My book gives no record of any 1725 Spanish coin of this kind. Mr.

Carter perhaps can help you."

"We'll ask him," said Frank.

The boys thanked "Wu Sing for his trouble and hurried out. But instead of going to visit Mr. Carter right away, they headed for home.

" Perhaps we 're just wasting time," Joe suggested. " The thing for us to do is to show this to ' Mr. Spanish.' He may be able to tell us all about it."

However, when their visitor saw the gold coin, he gazed at it in complete bewilderment.

"You say you found this in a pocket of my coat?" he asked, his delightful accent more pronounced than usual.

" A secret inside pocket. The men who robbed you must have overlooked it."

" A strange coin," mused " Mr. Spanish," examining the money. "Very strange. Very old.

But no-it means nothing to me."

"Perhaps you collected coins?" suggested Frank. "This isn't the sort of gold piece the average man would carry around with him."

"Mr. Spanish" sighed. "Perhaps I have been a coin collector. Who knows ? But I cannot remember." He passed a hand wearily across his eyes. "This gold piece means nothing to me at all."

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"I'm sorry," said Frank kindly.

The boys learned that Mr. Hardy expected to be at home for a few hours. Since they were not needed to watch their guest, they set out to call on Mr. Carter. The numismatist was deeply interested in the coin, but he could not identify the strange piece. Disappointed, Frank and Joe went on to see Doctor Wakefield. The elderly professor became excited when he saw the coin, but could shed no light on the mystery.

"If that coin is a genuine issue," he declared, "it must be very rare. I have no record of anything like it. As you know, the value of a coin increases with its rarity. This piece is probably worth thousands of dollars."

The boys did not tell him that they were not particularly concerned about the value of the coin as a collector's item. What interested them most was the connection the coin might have with the strange case of "Mr. Spanish." Frank was particularly intrigued by the curious similarity between the woman's head stamped on the coin and the woman's head tattooed on the hold-up man's chest.

"Do you think it might be a symbol of some kind?" suggested Joe, as he and his brother walked toward home. "Maybe it isn't a real coin at all-just a sort of token. Perhaps an identification disc for members of a society."

Frank thought Joe might have stumbled on a brilliant idea.

"It could be that," he agreed. "That would

88 The Melted Coins explain why the coin collectors haven't any record of the piece."

"In that case," continued Joe, "it could mean that 'Mr. Spanish' and the tattooed man--"

"Are members of the same outfit?"

Joe nodded. Both boys were troubled. They knew there was a good chance that Joe's guess might be correct. But they did not want to think so.

"I *can't* believe it!" Frank said. "'Mr. Spanish' is a gentleman. Surely he couldn't be mixed up with anyone like that hold-up guy!"

"After all, we don't know anything about our visitor. We like him, and he seems to be a fine fellow, but we could be wrong. Remember, he has lost his memory. When he is in his right mind he may be a dangerous crook."

"That's true."

The boys were passing Wu Sing's store at this particular moment. They heard an urgent tap on the window. When the Hardys looked up, they saw the elderly merchant beckoning to them from beyond the glass.

"Did you find out something about the coin, Wu Sing?" asked Frank eagerly when they went into the store.

The old Chinese seemed disturbed. "No, it is not about that coin," he said. "It is something else. Please to come into the back room."

When they entered the little office, Wu Sing carefully closed the door. Then he unlocked a desk drawer.

"After you left this afternoon," he said, "I received a letter-a threatening letter. I think you should see it."

He handed the boys the sheet of paper. They read in astonishment: Wu Sing: It will be a lot healthier for you if you keep your mouth shut about coins from now on. After this when the Hardys come around asking for information tell them to mind their own business. If you don't pay attention to this letter you will be looking for trouble.

CHAPTER XII

BLACKBEARD

the threatening letter to Wu Sing was crudely scrawled in pencil on cheap note paper.

No name was signed. Silently the Oriental showed the envelope to the Hardys. It had no postmark.

"This letter wasn't mailed," said Frank.

"No. Some unworthy person laid it on counter while I was in office," replied the Chinese.

He had no idea who that individual might have been.

"This is not good," muttered Wu Sing. "I do not wish trouble. Maybe you should not come here again."

"Have you shown this letter to the police?" asked Frank.

Wu Sing shook his head. By bringing the police into the picture, he explained, he might be creating the very trouble he wished to avoid.

"Bad men write that letter," he declared tremulously. "Better I should do as they say."

"Well, we certainly don't want to get you into hot water," Joe told him. "We 'll steer clear of your place from now on. If we really need your advice, we can always reach you by phone."

Blackboard 91

Wu Sing smiled gratefully. He shook hands warmly with the boys as they left, and it was plain that he was relieved by their willingness to spare him embarrassment.

"It proves we're bothering someone," Frank said as the boys walked home. "But whom?"

"And why?" added Joe. "We don't know whether the letter referred to the coins Chet found or to this gold one."

Late that afternoon, Fenton Hardy decided to make a quick trip to Washington by plane to complete plans for his journey out West. He took the Spanish coin with him.

"Perhaps one of the experts down there can identify it," he told his sons. "I'll be back tomorrow. No doubt I'll have something to tell you then."

The boys spent the rest of the day at home, for Aunt Gertrude insisted that "Mr.

Spanish" should not be left unwatched a minute. Their guest, polite and grateful for all the kindness the Hardys had shown him, was quite unaware of the fact that he was an object of such concern. The boys entertained him with stories of some of their detective adventures, and he listened with rapt interest.

"You must be experts in-what do you say-deduction!" cried "Mr. Spanish." "If you have solved other mysteries, who knows but that you can solve this mystery of mine. Who am I?"

Where do I come from ? Why am I here ?"

"We're trying, 'Mr. Spanish,' " Frank as-92 The Melted Coins
sured the man. " You can depend on it, we '11 do the best
we can."

As soon as Mr. Hardy returned from Washington the next
day, he told his sons that even a government expert had
been unable to give him any information about the strange
gold coin.

"For the time being, I'll turn 'Mr. Spanish's' case over to
you," he said. " See what you can make out of it. Frank, give
this coin back to our guest."

As Mr. Hardy planned to be at home all evening, there was
no need for the boys to remain on watch. Immediately after
an early dinner they slipped out of the house.

"I have an idea," said Frank mysteriously. " It might not lead
to anything, but I think it's worth trying. Come on."

He led the way through the streets of Bayport, heading
toward the waterfront section.

" I don't get this," said Joe. " What have you in mind?"

"Tattoo marks," declared Frank. "What type of men go in for
tattooing?"

" Lumberjacks and-and sailors!"

" Right. And here we are, living in a coastal city, and didn't
even think of it. Ten chances to one that hold-up man is or
has been a sailor. The place for us to search is along the
waterfront."

" For a man with a Spanish woman 's head tattooed on his chest ?"

" Or for someone who *knows* of a man with a Blackboard 93

Spanish woman's head tattooed on his chest." Bayport's waterfront was a picturesque but squalid part of the city. The streets were dark and crooked, crowded with second-hand stores, cheap hotels, and shabby restaurants. There was an unpleasant odor of strong food in the air. Mahogany-tanned men in caps and pea jackets strode the streets, ambling along with the rolling gait peculiar to sailors.

"Not very pleasant here," said Frank. In front of a shabby restaurant known as The Mariner's Coffee House a car was parked. The boys had almost passed it when Frank suddenly turned and gazed at the automobile.

"I may be wrong," he said quietly, "but this looks mighty like it." "Like what?" " The hold-up man's car!" Joe whistled softly. " Are you sure ?" "I can't be sure. I got only a glimpse of it, but this is the same make and model, same color -and one of the side windows had a crack in it, just like this one."

Joe looked at The Mariner's Coffee House. "Think your hold-up man may be in there?" "

Could be. Let's go in and look around." Joe held his brother back. "If we do that and he recognizes you, he '11 just clear out. Suppose I go in alone. If the man's there, he won't recognize *me*."

" How are you going to find out if he has a tattooed chest?"

94 The Melted Coins " I have an idea about that. You wait around the corner and keep an eye on this car."

Joe opened the restaurant door and stepped inside. It was a noisy, smoky place. Two or three sailors were perched on stools at a small lunch counter. Others were sitting around tables at the back of the restaurant. There was a good deal of hearty talk and argument. A mechanical piano was jangling away, adding to the cheerful racket.

Joe felt a little out of his element at first, but he had resolved on the part he was to play, so he did the best he could. He pulled his hat down over one eye, swaggered up to a table and sat down. He ordered a sandwich. While waiting to be served, he noticed an elderly sailor at the next table. The man's hands were blue with tattoo marks.

"Say, old-timer," drawled Joe, "I been thinkin' of gettin' myself tattooed. Where do I go to get a good job like that one o' yours?" he asked.

The old sailor was pleased. He rolled up his sleeves and revealed a complicated design ,of flags and serpents on his arms.

"Can't get a job like this done here in Bayport," he boomed. "Ain't nobody around this town can do a good tattooin' job. New York or New Orleans or Frisco, maybe. But not here."

A dark-skinned man with shifty eyes half turned around from the counter where he was eating, and listened intently. In a few moments Blackboard 95

he left by a side door, hurrying off to the next street.

Joe paid for his sandwich and carried it over to the old sailor's table. "Mind if I sit down?"

"Make yourself at home, sonny." He called over to a companion near by, a youngish, sallow-faced man. "Steve, here's a kid says he wants a tattooin' job. I'm tellin' him to lay off these local experts. That right?"

"Sure, you're right." The sallow man lounged over and pulled open the front of his shirt.

Across his chest was tattooed a patriotic design of the Statue of Liberty, completely surrounded by stars. "Now that was done in Eio. Took hours. And did it hurt! But it was worth it," he added proudly.

Most of the men in the restaurant knew one another. Everyone suddenly became personally interested in Joe's tattooing problem. They gathered around. Some advised him against being tattooed at all at his age. They said he might regret it later.

Two men gave him the addresses of tattooing experts in other waterfront cities. Several revealed strange marks on their arms and chests, and launched into long stories telling how the operations had been performed.

Joe saw nothing of a tattoo design of a woman's face with a Spanish headdress. He brought up the subject casually.

"Design I had in mind, if I ever do get tattooed, is a woman's head. Do you think a good 96 The Melted Coins tattoo man could put one on my chest? Something Spanish?"

"Sure-a real tattoo artist could make any design you like. Can't say I've ever seen one like the kind you mention, though," declared the old sailor.

Apparently none of the others had either. So after a while Joe said good-bye and swaggered out of the place. Around

the corner he found Frank.

"Any luck?" he asked his brother eagerly.

Joe shook his head. "I learned plenty about tattooing, and saw practically every design in the place. But no Spanish woman's head."

"I wonder how that car comes to be parked here? Sailors don't usually drive cars. Let's hang around for a while. If it belongs to the hold-up man, he may not have gone into the restaurant at all. He may be in some other joint near by."

The boys sauntered along the street. At the end of the block they turned and strolled back again, keeping the parked automobile under observation. They were nearing The Mariner's Coffee House again when a ragged boy emerged from an alley across the street and whistled to them shrilly.

"Hey-you in the blue suit!" called out the lad to Joe. "You're wanted."

"Who wants me?"

"A man over on the next street gave me a dime to tell you he wants to talk to you. He Blackbeard 97

says it's important. Come on-I'll show you the place."

The Hardy boys were suspicious.

"What's his name?" asked Joe.

"I dunno his name. He's a tattoo man. Hurry up if you 're coming."

"You'd better be careful," said Frank quietly to his brother. "It may be a trap. But I'd like to know what he wants."

They crossed the street. The urchin turned swiftly and led them down a dark alley into the next block, then into another alley. There he halted in front of a shabby little building, and beckoned to the boys.

"Come on," he called shrilly. "This is it. The man's waitin'."

"I don't like the looks of the place," muttered Joe, "but I'll go in. You'd better stay outside and watch, Frank," he whispered.

"Don't you think we'd better stick together?"

"If I'm not out in ten minutes, you'll know something is wrong, and can get help."

"Right." Frank turned and walked slowly down the alley.

"What's the matter with him? Ain't he coming?" demanded the urchin, who was waiting at the top of the steps.

"No. Where is this tattoo man who wants to see me?"

The boy opened the door and went inside. Joe followed him across the threshold into a squalid, foul-smelling place. The windows 98 The Melted Coins were dirty. The walls were stained and grimy. In a cluttered front room a faded, hand-lettered sign on the wall proclaimed: "Expert Tattooing Done Here. Bates Cheap."

All about the place were musty posters tacked to the walls. They were advertisements from various foreign countries.

Near the door stood a half-naked, dark-skinned man. He waved to the urchin, commanding him to wait outside for further errands. After the lad had gone, this strange person said to Joe: " My master is ready."

He opened a door to an inner room. The Hardy boy gasped in astonishment. At a table sat an immense, coarse-featured man, with a long, bushy black beard. He was dressed in pirate's clothes, and in his belt were stuck a long knife and a cutlass.

The fellow's sleeves were rolled up to the elbows, exposing muscular arms traced with a multitude of blue tattoo marks. His shirt, open at the throat, revealed tattooing on his chest.

"See them!" boomed the swarthy man, holding out his arm. "You ever see a tattooing job like that? Well, don't let anybody tell you a good job can't be done right here in Bayport.

I'm as good as any artist in the business, see, and don't let anyone tell you different. And why shouldn't I be?"

Joe realized that somehow or other word had Blackbeard 99 come to this queer individual from the Mariner's Coffee House that the boy wanted to be tattooed.

"And why shouldn't I be an artist at putting pictures on the human body that will stay on forever? I'm a descendant of Blackbeard. You've heard of Blackbeard, ain't you?"

" Blackbeard the pirate ?"

"The same. Bravest pirate that ever sailed the seven seas. My ancestor, him."

Joe gulped. He recalled that Blackbeard was known to have been the cruelest and most ferocious of all the pirates who plundered and tortured in the waters of the Caribbean. The boy remembered stories of how this ugly figure, when making an attack, used to stick

slow-burning matches in his beard to light up his evil eyes and frighten his captives. If this person before Joe truly were a descendant of this monster, anything might happen to the youth!

"I'll try to get a look at his chest and see if that tattoo mark with the Spanish woman's head is on there," thought Joe. "Then I 'll get out of here as fast as I can."

"Yes, I'm Blackbeard the pirate, too," gloated the man at the table. "And they say I look like my ancestor."

"Are your tattoo marks the same as his?" asked Joe.

"Dunno," said Blackbeard. "But I got some fine ones. Especially the picture on my chest."

The boy's heart thumped as the man tore 100 The Melted Coins open his shirt front. Revealed was a weird conglomeration of writhing blue snakes entwined about a ship under full sail.

"Ain't that wonderful?" cried Blackboard, Joe admired the work, then started for the door. This was not the man who had held up Frank.

"Now look, sonny-you want to be tattooed," Blackboard reminded him. "Well, I'm your man. And it won't cost you much either. Twenty-five dollars, and if you know anything about tattooing, you got to admit that's dirt cheap. In the big cities it would cost you twice as much."

Joe was evasive. " I 'm not so sure I want the job done right away. I'll let you know."

"I'll make it ten dollars."

"Well, I'll think it over," said Joe, suspicious now, and becoming anxious that he might not get away unmarked.

But Blackboard was not to be put off so easily. He suddenly leaped up and lunged around the table. He seized Joe by the collar.

" Not so fast," he growled menacingly. "You said you wanted to be tattooed, and you're going to be tattooed!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE POLICE HUNT

joe began to struggle. But Blackboard was strong and powerful.

"I'll tattoo you if it's the last thing I do! I'll do it for nothing!" He raised his voice, shouting, "Lopez! Come here!"

A door opened. The servant rushed in and flung himself at Joe. Against the two men the boy was helpless.

" Quick!" panted Blackboard.

Joe tried to shout, but the pirate's heavy hand was across his mouth, stifling any outcry.

Bitterly the lad wished he had not been so foolish as to follow the ragged urchin. He fought with all his strength, but Lopez produced a length of rope and whipped it around the boy's ankles. In a few minutes he was bound, gagged, and thrust onto a table.

"Get the needle, Lopez!" ordered Blackboard.

The servant scuttled into another room. The pirate, his heavy arms folded, looked at Joe with a satisfied air. Then he reached down and ripped open the boy's shirt.

" Give me the needle, Lopez!" he shouted.

Joe was utterly helpless, yet he struggled 101

102 The Melted Coins grimly against the ropes that bound him. Lopez stood by, handed Blackboard a long, sharp

needle in a holder. Joe felt a stab of pain as the tattoo artist crouched over him and the needle pricked the skin on his chest.

"You'll get a design you maybe never heard of before," grunted Blackboard. "First, I prick the design. Then comes the dye."

The sharp needle stabbed Joe's skin once more.

"I'll put the Curse of the Caribbees on you!" muttered Blackboard.

The Hardy boy wondered if he had heard right. The very expression "Mr. Spanish" had uttered! Was the man at their house mixed up with this horrible-looking creature ?

"The mark will stay with you for life," cried the pirate. "And my days of bad luck will be gone forever! Lopez, send for the other boy!"

In the meantime, Frank had been on watch in the street at the end of the alley. He was worried because his brother had not appeared. He glanced at the time. Eight minutes had passed; then nine. At the ten-minute mark, remembering Joe's instructions, he was tempted to go for help. But he knew he would be questioned if he did so. The Hardy boys had always preferred to handle their detective cases entirely by themselves.

Frank decided to wait a few moments longer. During this time, the automobile he suspected of belonging to the hold-up man, passed him. A The Police Hunt 103

girl was driving, and there were no other passengers.

«' Well, that's that," thought Frank.

When fifteen minutes had gone by, and there was still no sign of his brother, he determined to go for help. He looked about, planning to telephone the police from the nearest place, when suddenly out of the alley came the ragged urchin who had guided the Hardys over from the other street.

"Look here," Frank demanded. "I want to know what's happened to my brother. Where is he?"

"Keep your shirt on," retorted the boy impudently. "I just came out to look for you. Your brother said for you to meet him at the other end of the alley."

Frank felt relieved. Unsuspecting, he followed the lad.

"It ain't far," called back the youngster. "Your brother said for you to hurry."

Frank quickened his pace. He had gone not more than twenty feet from the street when a door opened. A shadowy figure sprang into the alley and pounced on him.

Frank's instinctive cry of alarm was muffled by a heavy hand being clapped over his mouth. There was a brief, unequal struggle. The urchin fled into the shadows, his treacherous work done. Frank was dragged inside the building and the door slammed shut.

The alley was deserted.

104 The Melted Coins Back on another street, across from the Mariner's Coffee Shop, a man quite different from the ferocious Blakbeard had been watching the Hardy boys

during their visit to the waterfront. He was an old Chinese laundryman with twinkling, friendly eyes.

While ironing shirts at the window of his tiny place of business, he had seen and recognized the brothers. The fact that they were friends of Wu Sing, who was a respected and powerful figure in the life of Bayport's Chinese community, aroused his interest.

When the old laundryman saw the boys follow the ragged lad, who was known along the whole waterfront as a "steerer" for unsavory resorts where sailors were sometimes beaten and robbed, he left his ironing board and stole out to investigate.

After looking up and down various streets, and seeing no sign of Frank and Joe, he went to a telephone and called Wu Sing. There ensued a brief conversation in Chinese.

When it ended, Wu Sing called up the Bayport Police Department.

"I am afraid the Hardy boys may be in trouble on the waterfront," he said. "I think perhaps you should go there quickly and find out," he urged.

When the message was relayed to Chief Col-lig, he wasted no words. He immediately ordered a car for the detail. He and three husky policemen began a systematic search of the area

The Police Hunt 105

pointed out by the laundryman. But there was no sign of the Hardys.

"The boy you saw take them away. Who was he?" the chief asked the Oriental, who had gone with them.

" His name Sammy. Bad boy."

The police knew whom he meant. They needed only one more offense from this urchin to send him to a Reform Home, where he would be away from bad influences and under the guidance of kindly men and women.

" I know him," said the chief," and the sooner we get hold of him the better. We 'll

concentrate on trying to find the lad."

News travels quickly along the waterfront. Even before the squad car had reached the neighborhood, the grapevine had spread word that the police were on their way. Among those to hear it was Sammy. Instantly the lad wondered if the officers were after him, or Blackbeard and Lopez. Should he warn them, or should he hide? The urchin took too long to decide. Before he could escape from either end of the alley where the pirate's house was, two husky policemen were running toward him, one from each direction. Sammy dodged into a cellar, but his freedom was short-lived. He was caught hiding behind a barrel.

"Where are those boys you brought here?" demanded the officer.

"Dunno."

106 The Melted Coins "Oh, yes you do. Now look here, Sammy, nothing bad is going to happen to you if you tell me."

By this time the policeman had the urchin outside. Sammy would say nothing, but he rolled his eyes toward a house across the alley.

"In there?" whispered his captor.

Chief Collig and the fourth policeman had arrived. Sammy knew the game was up.

"Yes," he gulped. "They're in the den of the guy with the black beard."

While a policeman held tightly to the lad, the others strode to the door of the shabby house. Chief Collig ordered one of the men around to the rear of the building, while he knocked loudly on the front entrance. No one answered. He tried to open the door. It was locked.

"Break it in!" snapped the chief.

His men flung their shoulders against the flimsy structure. Hinges creaked and snapped at the first impact. At the second onslaught the wood splintered and caved in with a resounding crash. The police stormed inside.

A brief glance told them the front room was empty. They surged quickly into the tiny one at the back.

CHAPTER XIV

A VALUABLE LETTER

Frank Hardy lay on a couch, bound and gagged. Joe had been left lying across the table.

Blackbeard and his sinister servant Lopez had vanished.

The Hardys were released quickly. They had suffered no real injuries. Fortunately for Joe, the pirate and his henchman had not had time to go very far with the tattooing, and there were just pinpricks on the boy's chest. The news of the police hunt apparently had come too soon for the men to start the dyeing process.

"After this," growled Chief Collig, "when you two boys decide on doing a little detective work down in this part of town, let us know ahead of time. If Wu Sing hadn't tipped us off, you might have been in a bad fix."

"Wu Sing!" exclaimed Frank in astonishment. "How did he know where we were?"

"From my very good friend," said a voice in the doorway.

The group turned to see Wu Sing and the laundryman standing there. Both Orientals were relieved to find the boys unharmed. Before anyone could thank them, however, the men bowed and vanished.

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108 The Melted Coins "Just like them," smiled Frank.

Collig ordered one of the policemen to take Sammy to headquarters. Then he turned to

the Hardys, telling them he would drive them home.

"How did you get into this jam?" he asked the boys as they rode along. "Better own up.

We don't want any more trouble."

The brothers explained how they had thought that the man who had held up Frank might be a sailor because of the picture on his chest, and of how they had been lured into Blackbeard's den trying to find him.

"Blackboard, huh 1" said Collig. "' We '11 try to pick him up. Never heard of him, or of Lopez, either."

"They'll probably sneak on board a ship and we'll never see them again," grunted one of the policemen.

Joe had not revealed that the man who called himself a descendant of a famous pirate had said he was going to transfer *The Curse of the Caribbees* to him. He did tell his brother and his father, however, as soon as they reached home.

In the privacy of his study-because the famous detective and his sons did not want to alarm Mrs. Hardy and Aunt Gertrude unnecessarily-Mr. Hardy listened intently to the whole story of his sons' adventure.

"Well, you both have been very lucky, that's all I can say," he observed, when they had A Valuable Letter 109

finished. "You might have run into very serious trouble. I think I'll call up Wu Sing and thank him."

Mr. Hardy expressed his appreciation to the Chinese merchant, and asked that the laundryman also be thanked.

"It is nothing," the Oriental said. "Always it is an honor that a man should help his friend."

When the detective replaced the receiver of the telephone, he turned to his sons. "From what you tell me, I'm inclined to believe Blackbeard is insane."

"He certainly didn't act like a normal person, " agreed Joe.

" Maybe he is mixed up with some gang," offered Frank, "and isn't crazy at all."

" True. While he is at large, I think you two boys had better take extra precautions," said his father. "I can't have you running risks."

"We might go out to Chet Morton's place for a few days," said Joe, wondering what his friend might have unearthed since he and his brother had left the farm.

"What about 'Mr. Spanish?' " asked Frank. "Who would watch him?"

"I can get a plainclothesman here any time I go away," his father replied. "Go ahead to Chet's. It's a good idea. And now I believe we should talk to 'Mr. Spanish.' That remark of Blackboard's about the *Curse of the Caribbees* may have some significance for him."

110 The Melted Coins The strange guest was called into the conference. He listened with grave interest while the boys told him about their evening's adventure.

" Blackboard ? Lopez ?" the man said finally.

He closed his eyes, vainly trying to remember. Then he regarded his friends helplessly.

"It is stupid of me. I am sorry. But I can remember nothing. About the coin found in my pocket, I remember nothing. About the *Curse of the Caribbees*-if I said something regarding it when I was in the hospital, I do not remember. It means nothing to me. No-none of this brings anything to my mind."

"Well, don't worry about it," advised Fenton Hardy kindly. "Everything probably will come back to you before long. Amnesia is a strange ailment. You may wake up some morning and remember your whole past life, clear as daylight."

"I hope so," said "Mr. Spanish" sadly. "It is a terrible thing to lose one's past, to know nothing about one's self at all."

The next morning, following their father's suggestion that they go to Chet's place for a vacation, the boys left the house soon after breakfast and set out for the Morton farmhouse.

They arrived at the front gate just in time to overhear Chet's father delivering a strong lecture to the crestfallen boy.

"Never in all my life have I seen anything like it!" declared Mr. Morton wrathfully. *"I thought there was something suspicious. I A Valuable Letter 111*

never knew you to work like that before. But why in the world, when I give you a simple little task to do, you can't just go and do it without making such an infernal mess, is more than I can understand."

"Well, I kind of got working on something else," murmured Chet apologetically.

" / should say you did. What were you trying to do-dig a canal ?"

Mr. Morton looked up at that moment and saw the Hardys grinning gleefully at their chum's discomfiture.

"Come on in, boys," he said cheerfully. Then he appealed to them. "Did you see what this son of mine has done to that field? I ask him to dig a ditch. Just an ordinary, simple little ditch that shouldn't have taken more than two or three hours.

"And what happens while I'm out of town? He works morning and night. He even camps down there. He sleeps there and takes his meals there. I came home last night and this morning I went down to see what he had done. And what do I find!" Mr. Morton's voice rose plaintively. "What do I find? I discover that he's gone and dug up half my field. It's in a terrible mess."

"I guess maybe we were to blame for some of that, Mr. Morton," said Frank.

Mr. Morton was not inclined to believe this. "Don't try to share the blame. You boys have good sense. You wouldn't go digging holes all 112 The Melted Coins over the place if you were asked merely to dig a ditch. But this son >f mine-I give him a simple job to do and he goes clean crazy. He makes an excavation job out of it." He turned to Chet again. "What *were* you up to, anyway?"

Chet gulped miserably.

"Better tell your father about it, Chet," suggested Frank.

"Do you mean to say there *is* an explanation? That it wasn't just plain nonsense?"

demanded Mr. Morton.

Chet gulped again.

"I-I was digging for buried treasure," he faltered at last.

"Buried treasure!" cried Mr. Morton. "Now I've heard everything. What on earth possessed you to dig for buried treasure down there?"

"Because I found some," muttered Chet.

He fished out the old coins from his pocket and handed them to his father.

"That's true, Mr. Morton," spoke up Joe. "We've been helping Chet. We were keeping the hunt a secret."

Mr. Morton examined the coins. His manner suddenly changed.

"This is odd," he said quietly. "Very odd. Buried treasure, eh? Do you mean to tell me you found these when you were digging the ditch?"

"Both of them," said Chet.

A Valuable Letter 113

The fat boy's father looked up. "Well," he said, "that's different. Why didn't you tell me about this before? Because now I can tell *you* a secret. I've done a little treasure-hunting on this property myself, but I kept quiet about it because I thought the whole thing probably was a hoax."

Chet's eyes bulged.

"Dad, do you mean to say you *know* there's treasure buried somewhere around here!"

"I can't say I know for sure. As I've just told you, I thought the whole thing might be a hoax, so I stopped looking. But since you've actually found these old coins, maybe there's something to it after all."

Mr. Morton went on to say that shortly after he had bought the farm, he did some repair work on the house. While tearing down a wall that was in bad condition, he had discovered

among the debris a small tin box which evidently had been hidden in the wall.

"The box contained an old letter," continued Mr. Morton. "A letter which told about a certain treasure that was supposed to be buried somewhere on the property. Naturally I was excited about my find, but I kept quiet about it, just in case it turned out to be a hoax."

Frank and Joe looked at each other. Mr. Morton's story had put a totally new light on things; not only on the idea of a treasure buried long ago, but also on the Hardys'

assumption that a thief had buried loot there recently.

114 The Melted Coins Now it looked as if the intruder had been digging for the treasure. Since he had not returned, there came again the harrowing thought: had he found it?

"Did the letter say the treasure was in the field by the brook!" asked Chet hopefully. He had forgotten everything else.

"It merely said the treasure was in a field, but didn't say which field. I can remember plainly the directions it gave. Ten paces west of the oak tree, four paces south to the white boulder, then seven paces east on a line with the brook.

"I did my digging in the field at the north boundary of the property, up by the head of the brook. There were a lot of white boulders there at the time, and I thought one of them might be the marker."

Chet was greatly excited. Gone were his doubts about the existence of the treasure.

"Come on!" he yelled to Frank and Joe. "We're on the right trail now. Let's get back to digging again!"

"I'll get the letter," declared Mr. Morton enthusiastically, starting for the house. "You boys go on down to the field."

On the way Frank asked Chet if Tony had come out to help him.

"No, he's working for his father. But I kept an eye on things!" he added proudly.

When Mr. Morton and the boys gathered by the brook about fifteen minutes later, the three

A Valuable Letter 115

chums gazed at the ancient letter in awe. The sheet was about ready to fall apart at the places where it had been creased. The ink had faded so much that the words were barely discernible.

" It must be very old," remarked Frank. " A hundred years or more."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Morton, "but how valuable ? That's the important thing."

" If the coins we found are part of the treasure, maybe the letter is much older," said Chet.

"That's not likely," guessed Joe, "because your house isn't more than a hundred years old, is it, Mr. Morton?"

"The letter could have been taken there from an older house on the place," Chet insisted.

"Well, let's get started. We begin at an oak tree," said his father.

The boys went immediately to the only oak tree that grew near the brook.

"Now 'ten paces west,' " read Mr. Morton.

His son measured the distance.

" 'Four paces south to the white boulder.' "

This was not so easy, for the only large stone in sight was a little farther away than the directions stated.

"It probably moved," declared Chet, undaunted by this delay.

"And now 'seven paces east on a line with the brook,' " said Mr. Morton.

His son paced off the seven steps, came to a halt, and looked at his father.

"If we dig around here," the man said, "I 116 The Melted Coins believe we should be reasonably near the spot." Spades were produced. Chet's father, who had been scolding his boy not half an hour before for the amount of excavation work

that had been done on the meadow, was soon digging with as much enthusiasm as the others. Sod and earth flew in all directions for several minutes. Then Chet cried out suddenly: "Stop! Wait a minute!"

CHAPTER XV

THE HIDDEN PIT

Frank, Joe, and Mr. Morton crowded around Chet to see what had happened.

"Did you find the treasure?" his father asked eagerly.

"I've found something," puffed his stout son, reaching into the hole he had dug.

Eased in the face, and with teeth clenched, the youth at last succeeded in unearthing what he had been struggling for. At first glance one might have mistaken it for a box, but it proved to be only a stone, rust in color and nearly square in shape.

"Aw gee, I thought I had the treasure," groaned Chet, wiping perspiration from his forehead. "I guess we aren't digging in the right place."

"You mustn't get discouraged so easily," advised his father.

But after an hour of hard work under the hot sun, even Mr. Morton began to reconcile himself to disappointment and defeat. They had discovered nothing.

"Maybe we're in the wrong field," suggested Frank hopefully. "Perhaps the boulder mentioned in the letter is in another place."

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118 The Melted Coins "The course of the brook may have changed since the directions were written," added Joe.

Mr. Morton rested wearily on the handle of his spade and looked around.

" Maybe I was right the first time in thinking that the letter is a hoax," he said.

Chet held to the opinion that the letter was genuine, and that they merely were looking in the wrong spot. Then, too, the intruder of a few evenings before might have found the treasure and removed it.

"You boys will have to carry on alone," said Mr. Morton. "Treasure or no treasure, I have to get back to my work."

He took the two old coins from his pocket and handed them to Frank.

"Suppose you show these to your father," he said. Then he wagged a finger at Chet.

"No more secrets from me, young man. If you find anything that looks like a clue to buried money, I want to know about it right away."

Chet promised faithfully to keep his father informed of everything that happened in the treasure hunt from then on. After the man had gone up to the farmhouse, the boys began a search of other fields, but found neither oak trees nor white boulders.

"We don't even know if that letter refers to this farm," said Joe. "It might have been brought here from some distant place."

"But how about that guy who was digging here one night!" asked Chet. "He must have The Hidden Pit 119

known about it. Otherwise why would he have knocked me out? He probably was afraid that I would find the treasure."

"I still think," maintained Frank, "that the fellow who attacked you wasn't concerned with treasure. He was trying to find some loot he had buried around here somewhere."

"You mean lately?"

"Yes. Something he probably stole in Bayport quite recently."

The Hardy boy had reached into his pocket, and now drew forth a map of Bayport and its surrounding towns.

"What are you looking for?" asked Joe.

"I have an idea," said Frank. "Suppose that fellow who slugged Chet was the one who attacked 'Mr. Spanish,' and took coins, paper money, even jewelry from him."

"Yes. What of it?" asked Joe. He did not follow his brother's reasoning.

"Where does a thief usually hide after a robbery?" asked Frank.

"The place where he lives," replied Chet. "Or where his pals hang out."

"Precisely."

Frank took a pencil from his pocket and drew a straight line from the exact spot where "Mr. Spanish" had been waylaid, through the Morton farm, and on into the country. It came to a place called Hixon.

"You think the thief lives in Hixon?" Joe could see now what his brother was driving at.

120 The Melted Coins " That's my guess," said Frank. " But I also think he buried the loot somewhere along the route on his way home. What say we follow the trail indicated by this pencil line? If the thief hasn't already found what he was digging for, maybe we shall!"

"I believe you've got something there," cried Joe. "If we don't find the loot, at least we may find the thief." Then another thought struck him. "But how would you recognize him if you did meet him?"

"I don't know," confessed Frank, "but it may be that he'll turn out to be the same fellow who held me up."

"Let's go!" cried Joe, eager for action. "You lead the way."

The three boys started off in a westerly direction. They reached the far fence that bordered the Morton farm without finding any spot that might suggest a hiding place for loot.

After climbing the fence, they set off in the direction of Hixon.

"That map idea of yours is all right, providing the thief walked in a straight line," objected Chet wearily. "But what if he didn't?"

"We'll have to take our chances on that," replied Frank. "If he was in a hurry to hide his loot, he wouldn't wander all over the countryside. Maybe this idea of mine won't work, but I 'm going to try it out."

They had gone about a hundred yards farThe Hidden Pit 121

ther when Chet spied a large, grayish rock in the grass some distance ahead.

"Say, that might be the white boulder mentioned in the old letter," he cried, excited.

"Your idea is all right, Frank, but after all a buried treasure is more interesting."

"The boulder isn't very white," Joe bb-marked.

"It could have been a few years ago."

"It's too small for a boulder. And there' *no oak tree near it.*"

But Chet was not to be discouraged so easily. He raced ahead to investigate the rock.

Suddenly he skidded to a stop.

"Hey! Come quick!" he shouted back, "This looks like something."

The Hardys sped to join him. What Chet had come upon was a shallow depression in the ground.

"I'll bet the treasure is here!" he cried, and hurried back across the fence to get a shovel.

When the Hardys examined the spot carefully, they saw that the grass was discolored; some of it was dry and dead.

"Almost looks as if the sod had been dug up lately and then put back," remarked Joe to his brother.

"Earth does sink like this when a hole is dug and then filled in again."

"I'm sure the treasure isn't here, but maybe the loot is!" said Frank excitedly. "The place is worth investigating."

122 The Melted Coins In a few minutes Chet returned with a shovel. The brothers said nothing as their chum attacked the depression in the earth. He was so excited by his find that he chattered like a parrot.

"Yes, sir, I'll bet this is it. Frank, that idea of yours about hitting across country was sure lucky for me. I wonder how much the treasure is worth. Thousands of dollars, likely. What will we do with all the money? Oh, boy, just wait till I go up to the house and tell Dad I found the buried treasure!"

"You haven't found it yet," Joe reminded his chum.

"I will!" declared Chet confidently. He stepped back, put down his spade, and rubbed his hands together gleefully. "Yep!" the stout boy declared blithely, "I think I've fallen right into it this time-----"

Suddenly Chet seemed to lose his balance. His mouth flew open. He did a wild war dance trying to steady himself. Then the ground dropped from beneath his feet. His arms went up, there was a splintering crash, and the Morton boy disappeared from view as if the earth had opened and swallowed him.

"Great Scott!" shouted Frank. "He's gone!"

The brothers rushed to the brink of the hole, fearful that their chum had tumbled into a deep well and might drown.

"Chet!" yelled Joe. "Are you all right?"

The Hidden Pit 123

From below came a wheezy gasp, followed by a splutter and a cough.

" G-get me out of here!"

The pit was about three feet across. The Hardys suddenly realized the sides might cave in and engulf their chum. Upon investigation they found that the earth around the hole was solid, however. The walls were lined with stones. The boys peered down, but could not see their chum because splintered boards were sticking out from the sides of the pit.

"I think I've broken my neck!" groaned Chet. "Lower a rope, somebody, and pull me out of here quick!"

In a moment he struggled to his feet, and reported, to the others' relief, that he was unharmed. He was only about ten feet below the surface, but when Frank and Joe tried to reach him, they found it was impossible to haul Chet out.

Joe sped back to the tent, still set up in the Morton Held, for a length of rope. Frank stretched out on the grass at the top of the pit, and kept up Chet's courage by assuring him that rescue would be only a matter of minutes.

"What in the world do you suppose this hole is anyhow?" asked the fat boy. "It looks like a well, but it isn't deep enough. And there's no water."

"Those are broken boards above you, aren't they?" asked Frank.

"I must have crashed through a platform.

124 The Melted Coins There probably was loose dirt and sod on top of it, so I couldn't see the boards. My weight was too much for them."

"Good reason for reducing," grinned Frank. "Any treasure down there?"

"I don't feel anything," Chet called back after groping around. "It's too dark to see, though. But when I fell in, I was sure I heard something hard land ahead of me."

Frank was thinking fast. A stone-lined hole, a platform-he remembered a story he had once read about some pirates who had buried their loot at various levels of a pit by building a series of wooden platforms at different heights. On each of these they had laid a part of their treasure and piled dirt over it all.

Anyone finding the topmost hiding place, which always held the least in value, would conclude that he had found all the treasure and the rest of it would remain undisturbed.

Frank wondered if this pit might be an ingenious hiding place of the same nature. He also immediately thought of the pirate Blackbeard and his tattooing descendant.

Joe came scurrying back with the rope, and the Hardys lowered it to Chet. After much puffing and pulling, their chum was hauled to the surface, where he lay gasping on the grass.

"Gosh, that was a narrow squeak! Lucky I wasn't buried alive!" he grunted. "No more pits for me, I can tell you that!"

The Hidden Pit 125

"What do you mean? Aren't you going down there again and look for the treasure?" Joe giped Mm. "You wouldn't give up that easily."

"Not me," puffed the rescued boy, but in a moment he changed his mind.

Frank outlined his theory of the platforms and the pit levels. Joe was impressed, and Chet's eyes bulged.

"You mean maybe some pirates built this thing?" he gasped.

Frank shrugged, and began looping the rope underneath his arms. "I'm going down to find out if anything has been hidden there, either long ago or recently."

"It's too dark to see anything," Chet warned him.

"I happen to have a flashlight," grinned Frank. "Come on, boys. Grab hold of this rope and lower away."

lie advanced to the edge of the pit and let himself over the side. While the others paid out the rope, Frank descended past the broken platform. Down at the bottom at last he turned on the flashlight, and began his investigation.

The walls were of solid stone, well built. It was possible the place had been a well originally and had dried up. Perhaps the platform had been added recently by someone who knew the story of this method of hiding loot.

"Find anything?" shouted Joe.

126 The Melted Coins "Not yet." Frank's voice was muffled. "But it sure looks as if this pit was made for some good

reason."

He now tackled the debris of loose dirt and shattered boards which lay on the floor of the pit. His search did not seem to reveal what Chet had heard falling down ahead of him.

The stout boy was growing nervous, fearing for his chum's safety.

"For all you know, you may be standing on *another* platform right now," he shouted down. "If the floor should cave in, we might never get you out. Better give up and come back.

Your father and mother wouldn't-----"

Suddenly Frank called out. There was a note of excitement in his voice.

" I think I Ve-yes!" he cried. " Haul away, fellows 1 *I've found something!*"

CHAPTER XVI

THE LEATHER POUCH

Chet and Joe hauled wildly at the rope to pull Frank from the pit. He was soon at the top.

In his arms he held a leather pouch.

"Treasure!" whooped Chet, almost letting go the rope in his excitement.

Frank stumbled over the brink of the hole and dropped the bag to the ground. As he slipped himself loose from the rope, the others pounced on the find.

The pouch, large and heavy, was tied with a leather thong. Joe opened it and peered within.

"What is it? What's in it?" babbled Chet, capering about as he tried to see.

Joe dug his hand in and produced a palm full of coins. Chet cut loose with a frantic cheer that could be heard as far away as the Morton farmhouse. Frank grabbed the pouch and turned it upside down, dumping its contents on the ground. In awe the boys gazed upon several hundred coins; some gold, some silver.

"The letter was right!" shouted Chet. "We've found the long-buried treasure! Hey, what's the matter with you, Joe? You don't seem to be excited at all," he complained.

The other was examining the money in his

128 The Melted Coins hand. Then he looked at the pile on the ground.

"That's funny," he said. "There's nothing on these coins."

"What do you mean, nothing on them?" asked Chet in amazement.

"I can't tell what kind of coins they are," Joe replied. "The impressions have been melted off them."

This was true. Each piece in the heap was merely a disc of metal, dateless and faceless, with every clue to identification erased. The boys sorted them over. Not a coin had been overlooked in the melting process.

"Why would anybody do that?" asked Chet, bewildered by the discovery.

"So the coins couldn't be traced if they had been stolen," Joe answered.

"But they're no good this way," objected his fat chum.

"No, but they could be melted into a big lump of gold or silver and sold."

"Or they could be restamped by a counterfeiter," added Frank.

"You mean to say some thief planned to do such a thing a couple of hundred years ago?" Chet wanted to know.

"No," said Frank. "The fellow who had these coins put them here recently. This leather pouch is a new one."

In dismay Chet looked at the bag and had to agree. He hung his head mournfully.

"You fellows are too smart," he complained.

The Leather Pouch 129

"You take all the joy out of life. Here I thought the buried treasure was mine, and now-Say," he said, brightening, as a thought struck him, "how do you explain this pit? Don't tell me your thief dug such a big hole for just one little bag of coins!"

Chet had turned the tables neatly. Now he grinned in satisfaction, for the Hardys had to admit that their chum had made a good point.

"The pit must have been constructed a long time ago," said Frank slowly. "Maybe your treasure was buried there and someone dug it up recently. The thief may even have melted off the markings on the coins he found and then put them back here in a new bag."

"I'll bet there's a lot more money down in this hole," said Chet, cheerful again. "How about that idea of the platforms?" he asked. "Perhaps the one I fell through *is* just the first of several. Even if these coins aren't part of the treasure, the stuff mentioned in the letter may be hidden down there."

The boys talked things over. It was decided that since Joe had not been down at all, lit should be the one to go. He picked up the rope and a shovel. The other two lowered him carefully into the pit.

On the floor of it Joe rummaged through th«, debris, then began digging for another platform. After a while he gave

the order to haul up. When he scrambled back to the surface, he shook his head.

130 The Melted Coins "Solid bottom," he reported. "Just earth and rocks. There was only one platform and only one pouch. We've found all there was to find."

"Now I don't know whether these coins are the treasure we're looking for or not," sighed Chet. "Let's take them up to the house and show them to Dad."

"All right, but first I'd like to investigate something else. Suppose you go on up to the house, Chet. I want to follow the line on this map and see if I can get any clues to the man we want to locate."

"I'll go with you," offered Joe.

Chet trundled off to see his father, while the Hardys searched the ground and also several farm buildings which were on the route. They found nothing. Presently they came to the small town of Hixon.

"Let's ask a few questions around here and see what we can find out," suggested Frank.

"We can't very well ask people if they're thieves, can we?" grinned Joe.

"No, but we might get wind of someone with a Spanish woman's head tattooed on his chest."

"That's right. And there might be someone around who collects coins or is interested in them in some special way."

The brothers separated and combed the town for information. An hour later they met at a restaurant. Each

one reported total failure.

"I guess my idea wasn't so good," Frank The Leather Pouch
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conceded. "Well, let's eat and get back to the Mortons'. We 're supposed to be in hiding from Blackbeard, you know," he grinned.

He and Joe read the menu. After they had eaten several delicious, home-cooked dishes, they wished Chet had come along. He could have done better justice to the apple pie and cheese than they possibly could.

"Before we leave," said Joe, "I believe I'll phone home and see if there's any news.

Maybe 'Mr. Spanish' has regained his memory."

Such was not the case, as the boy learned from Aunt Gertrude. She had other information of importance, however.

"I suppose you and Frank will have to come traipsing back here," she said. "But why you get yourselves involved in so many things, I don't understand. When I was your age, young folks weren't allowed to be going in and out, in and out all the time."

"What's happened, Aunty?" asked Joe.

"Plenty. A fine coin collection has been stolen here in Bayport!"

"WThat!"

"You heard me."

"Whose collection?" Joe shouted.

"You don't have to scream at me," replied Aunt Gertrude.

"Mr. Carter was robbed. He wants to see you boys right away."

"We'll get there as fast as we can!"

Joe hung up, hurried to Frank, and reported what he had just heard.

132 The Melted Coins "How are we going to get to Bayport?" his brother groaned. "There's no train or bus from here, and we haven't a car or a bicycle."

"If my eyes don't fail me, we '11 go there by truck," said Joe, dashing from the restaurant. Frank followed.

Down the street came an empty vehicle from the Prito Construction Company. On the driver's seat sat the Hardy boys' friend Tony, who worked for his father when he was not at school.

"Hey!" yelled Joe.

Tony grinned and pulled up at the curb. "Want a ride? Free service to Bayport."

"You bet we do."

The brothers climbed aboard and soon were back in their home town. Tony dropped them off near Mr. Carter's residence. Frank and Joe found the numismatist in his library talking to Chief Collig.

"It was the hobby of a lifetime," the collector was saying sadly. "I spent many years collecting those coins. Now they're gone. I suppose I'll never see them again."

"Don't give up hope," said the officer. "'We'll do our best to recover them."

The boys were told the story of the theft. Mr. Carter had gone to bed the previous night after having spent a quiet hour rearranging his collection. The coins had been locked in a cabinet in his library.

That morning, shortly after breakfast, he The Leather Pouch
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had entered the room to find the cabinet door forced open and the collection gone. The thief or thieves had gained access by jimmying one of the library windows.

"I wish I had taken your advice, boys, and guarded the coins more carefully," the man said.

"All we have to work on are a few footprints, " said Chief Collig to the Hardys. " But we'll solve the case, never fear."

"I'd like to see the footprints," said Frank. "Do they match any you have on record, Chief?"

Collig replied that they did not. Accordingly he assumed the thief was not a wanted criminal. He led the way outside and paused before the library window. A flower bed close

to the side of the house revealed two marks.

"The thief had to step in soft earth," the chief pointed out. "That was a break for us.

Those footprints may land him in jail."

Frank was down on hands and knees examining the marks. Suddenly he straightened up and pulled something from his pocket.

"What's that?" asked Collig.

"Impressions of footprints I made a few days ago. Remember I brought them to headquarters?"

Collig grew red in the face. He watched in embarrassment as the boy compared the two sets of prints, almost hoping they would not be identical. But they matched perfectly.

134 The Melted Coins "Well, I have to give you credit," said the chief. "But I don't know what good this information is going to do us. Where'd you see these footprints the first time?"

"On Chet Morton's farm. One night somebody knocked our friend out in a field. We've been trying to find the fellow ever since. This was the only clue we had."

"Hmph." Chief Collig looked thoughtful. "Did you figure he was a thief?"

"We weren't sure, but now I'm certain he is," replied Frank.

"I'll call up some of the police departments in neighboring towns and tell them to be on the lookout for anybody selling old coins," said the officer.

"How about Doctor Wakefield's collection?" Joe suggested. "The professor may be next on the list if the thief is still in town."

"That's so," agreed Collig. "I'll find out if he's had any trouble."

"Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea to keep an eye on his house," suggested Joe. "You might catch the thief red-handed."

"Just what I had in mind," declared the chief hastily. "You took the words out of my mouth. I'll set a trap. I'll have this case cleared up in a few hours."

Frank and Joe winked at each other. After the officer had gone back to headquarters, the younger boy said: The Leather Pouch 135

"If there's any excitement around Doctor Wakefield's place, I'd like to be in on it. Jerry Gilroy's house is just across the street from the doctor's. What say we ask Jerry to let us watch from a front window?"

Frank was enthusiastic about the idea. He thought no one would come until after dark, so the boys went home for a while, instead of to Chet's. They telephoned to him, however, telling him about the matching footprints.

"Maybe the fellow who whammed you will be caught tonight," Joe informed his chum enthusiastically.

"Gee, I sure hope so," replied Chet.

He went on to say that his father had gone out, and so he had not yet had a chance to show him the melted coins. Chet promised to go back to the field and stay on guard.

After darkness had fallen that night, the Hardy boys slipped from the house and hurried over to Jerry Gilroy's. Jerry readily agreed to let the Hardy boys use the living room as a

post of observation, and offered to help them watch Doctor Wakefield's residence. The three took up positions behind the curtains, where they could see what was going on across the street.

For a while nothing happened. An occasional car sped down the road and passed by.

Then Frank suddenly nudged his brother.

"Look who's coming!"

136 The Melted Coins Down the street shuffled a bearded, bespectacled old man. He glanced neither to right nor to left.

"Looks like Batchy!" exclaimed Joe.

They watched the old fellow's progress along the sidewalk. When he reached the

Wakefield house, he turned in at the front walk and slowly climbed the porch steps. They saw him stand for a few moments at the door. Then it was opened by Doctor Wakefield and the caller went inside.

"I suppose a detective is hiding somewhere around to see if any funny business goes on," remarked Frank.

"Yes, if Chief Collig carried out his plan," agreed Joe.

"I hope something does happen," said Jerry. "This street is so peaceful, I believe a little excitement would be a good thing for it. Oh, look, that old man is coming out."

Batchy's visit had been very brief. The door of the house had opened again. Apparently Doctor Wakefield did not

show his visitor out, for the caller himself closed the door.

He crossed the veranda. Slowly he came down the steps and plodded off up the street.

"Probably called on Doctor Wakefield to have another look at the collection," said Frank.

"And nothing happened," added Jerry in disgust. "Why couldn't we have had a robbery or something?"

"Nevertheless, it's queer the way Batchy The Leather Pouch
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keeps popping up whenever we 're suspicious of something," Frank remarked.

The boys watched the old man as he disappeared from view into the darkness beyond the corner street light.

"Shall we go home?" Joe asked his brother. "I guess Doctor Wakefield's collection is safe enough."

"Let's wait a while longer," pleaded Frank.

Another minute passed. Then abruptly the silence of the deserted street was broken by the shrill blast of a police whistle!

CHAPTER XVII

THE SECOND BURGLARY

As *soon* as the whistle sounded, the Hardy boys saw a dark figure emerge from the shrubbery in front of the Wakefield house and race down a path toward the back.

"Come on!" shouted Joe, heading for the door. "This looks like action."

Frank was at his brother's heels. Jerry Gil-roy scrambled out with them.

They leaped down the steps and tore across the street. As the boys ran, they heard two men talking excitedly in the back yard of the Wakefield place.

"Bit me!" cried one. "Bit my hand as soon as I blew my whistle."

"Well, let's go after them."

"We're supposed to be on guard here. The chief said not to leave the place for a minute."

Frank and Joe realized that the two men were detectives from the Bayport police force, posted there by Chief Collig to guard against any attempt to steal Doctor Wakefield's fine coin collection.

"What happened?" shouted Frank.

The detectives looked up. One of them was 138

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nursing an injured hand. Both men recognized the Hardy boys.

"I was watching the rear of the house, when a fellow sneaked down the alley and began working at the cellar door with a skeleton key," said Detective Gibbs, the man with the injured hand. "I blew my whistle to warn Casey, who was watching the front of the place. The moment I whistled, a dog rushed out from nowhere and bit me."

"I think we'd better chase that fellow," grumbled Casey.

"I took a shot at him as he was going over the fence," said Gibbs. "But I missed," he added ruefully. "You can chase him if you want to, but Collig said to stay here."

Frank had a sudden thought. He remembered the episode at the Hardy home, when the

house was burglarized while everyone was distracted by the dog fight in the back yard.

"While we're standing here talking," he exclaimed, "perhaps the real thief is making off with Doctor Wakefield's coin collection."

He ran up the back steps and tried the rear door. It was locked; but in a moment the professor opened it. Frank, followed closely by the other boys, hurried into the house.

"What's going on here?" demanded the old coin collector, who had on a dressing gown and pajamas. "A man can't get to sleep in this neighborhood any more without being kept awake by the racket. Whistles, dogs, guns, people shouting-----"

"Your coin collection, Doctor!" said Frank. "Is it safe?"

Doctor Wakefield blinked at him in surprise.

"Why shouldn't it be safe? I locked it up just before I went to bed. It's in a cabinet in the living room."

He turned and led the way toward the front of the house. When he entered the living room, he gasped, then cried out: "My collection! It's gone!"

The cabinet had been forced open. The valuable coins had disappeared.

Detectives Gibbs and Casey had followed the boys into the house. Now they looked dumbfounded and crestfallen when they learned what had happened.

"But how could anyone steal the collection from under our noses?" demanded Gibbs plaintively. "I was watching the back door like a hawk, and Casey was watching the front."

He glared at his colleague. "You, Casey!" he thundered. "Somebody must have got past you."

"Nobody went in the front door except an old man calling on the doctor, and he stayed only a minute."

"We saw him," said Joe.

"That was Mr. Eatchy," explained Professor Wakefield. "He wanted to see the coins, but

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I told him I was ready for bed and he'd have to come some other time."

"Batchy? Who's Ratchy?" demanded Detective Gibbs suspiciously.

"The old man we saw go into the house," Frank told him.
"Let's see if the front door is unlocked. He may have slipped the latch and sneaked in here while all of us were in the back."

The boys investigated the front door. Sure enough, the latch had been fixed to permit entrance without a key! The detectives were chagrined.

"I hate to report this," said Gibbs.

"Me too," added Casey.

Doctor Wakefield was greatly upset by his loss. The boys did their best to console him, telling the elderly man that at least they had a clue to the thief. They gave the two detectives a complete description of Ratchy before they left.

"We 'll get him," declared Gibbs confidently. "Now that we know who he is, how can we miss?"

After the Hardys had thanked Jerry Gilroy for his help and were on their way home, Frank pointed out that various elements of the coin case were beginning to dovetail.

"I think the man who sneaked into our house and the thief who stole Doctor Wakefield's collection are either in league, or the same man 142 The Melted Coins working with pals. The scheme was carried out the same way both times. They staged a disturbance at the back of the house to take everyone away from the front, so that the theft could be accomplished.

"I believe you're right. And there was a dog in each case, too."

It was late when the boys reached home, so they did not have a chance to show Chet's

coins to their father, or to tell him about the evening's affair and the discovery of the melted coins until breakfast the next morning. Fenton Hardy praised his sons, and advised them to work on the mystery along the lines they had adopted.

"Wish I could help you," he said, "but I start this morning on my trip West in connection with that stolen gold I was telling you about. I 'm taking the ten o 'clock train."

"Will Frank and I have to stay here with 'Mr. Spanish?' " asked Joe. "We'd like to work on the melted coin case."

"I'll make arrangements to have a plainclothesman come and stay here while I'm away,"

replied his father, just as Aunt Gertrude came downstairs and entered the room.

She became excited at once.

"What! Isn't it bad enough to have the house all cluttered up with a crazy man for a guest? Now you're going to bring a detective here to live. I won't stand for it! I'll cut my vacation short. I'll leave."

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"Now, Gertrude, you don't mean that, I'm sure," said Mrs. Hardy. " 'Mr. Spanish' is no trouble, and as for the plainclothesman, he will be here for your own protection."

"There's something mysterious about this whole business that I don't know about,"

grumbled Aunt Gertrude. "Why can't I be told what's going on anyway? The boys are out at all hours of the night. Burglars get in here. A man without a memory eats and sleeps here.

Why must I be kept in the dark?"

Frank decided that curiosity, rather than resentment, was behind Aunt Gertrude's little outburst. It would do no harm, he decided, to let her in on part of the mystery at any rate.

From his father he got the two coins that had been found in the Morton field.

"It all began with these, Aunt Gertrude," he said, handing them to her.

The woman took the objects and examined each with grim interest. Then, to the utter astonishment of her nephews, she looked up and said: "Well, as I live and breathe-a Pine Tree Shilling and a piece of Hog Money! Where in the world did you get these? They're very rare!"

"Why, Aunty!" exclaimed Frank. "How do you happen to know so much about old coins?"

Aunt Gertrude had spoken impulsively. For a moment she looked flustered. Then she glared at her nephews.

The Melted Coins "Surely a body can have some secrets!" she said tartly.

Whereupon, in considerable confusion, she stalked from the room, muttering something they could not hear. Fenton Hardy raised his eyebrows inquiringly and glanced at his wife.

"Seems as if my sister knows a good deal more than we've given her credit for," smiled the detective.

Frank and Joe were thinking fast: first of the episode at the railroad station when their relative had told them about the counterfeit coins; now, of her revelation about Chet's pieces; and last of all, her reference to a secret.

"Aunt Gertrude accuses us of being mysterious," said Joe. "She's pretty mysterious herself."

"What do you suppose the secret is, Dad?" asked Joe.

His father shrugged his shoulders. "I have often thought my sister should have been a detective," he replied. "She certainly can keep things to herself, she reads character pretty well, and sometimes she hits the nail on the head by combining intuition with deduction."

"I wonder if she really does know something about coins and counterfeiters that we ought to find out from her," mused Frank.

"It would be a challenge to try," replied Mr. Hardy with a smile.

CHAPTER XVIII

COUNTERFEITS

"Boys," said Mrs. Hardy a few minutes after her husband had left for the airport to catch

a plane West, "do you mind going over to Mawling for me again this morning? I have more club funds to deposit in the bank."

Frank and Joe smiled at their mother.

"You know we don't mind," said Frank.

"Give us the money and we'll be off like a ehoot," added Joe.

Thus it happened that the brothers were in Mawling when Joe thought he saw old man Eatchy. While Frank went into the Trust Company, Joe lounged behind the wheel of the car, taking in the sights of the active little town.

Small though the village was, it boasted of two banks, situated diagonally across from each other on the public square. Joe, glancing idly around, saw Ratchy descend the steps of the Peoples Bank. The bent figure disappeared around the corner of the building into the next street.

"Ratchy!" decided Joe.

Instantly he jumped from the car and hurried across the square. When he rounded the corner of the Peoples Bank and looked up the 145

146 The Melted Coins side street, the elderly man was nowhere to be seen.

"I wonder if he *was* Ratchy. Maybe I can find out in the bank."

He went inside. There were no other customers there at the moment.

" An old man was in here a few minutes ago," Joe said to the teller. "Do you know his name?"

The clerk shook his head. "No, I don't. He came in to change some money."

"Dimes?" asked Joe.

The teller glanced at him in surprise.

"How did you know? Sure-he had a lot of dimes he wanted changed into bills. Twelve dollars' worth."

" Did he tell you the dimes were the proceeds from a children's entertainment?"

Again the teller looked surprised.

"You seem to know a good deal about the old fellow. What's the trouble? Anything wrong?"

"If the dimes were counterfeit, you'd know, I suppose," said Joe.

"Counterfeit? I should say I *would* know. He couldn't get away with trying to pass any bogus silver on me."

The bank teller opened a package of the coins. He examined several of them closely, tested the milled edges with his thumb, rang them on the counter.

" They 're good all right. What's it all about ?

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What made you think they might be counterfeit?"

"I didn't think they were counterfeit. But I just thought I'd make sure."

Leaving the man scratching his head in some bewilderment, the Hardy boy left the bank.

He crossed the square just as Frank emerged from the Trust Company. Joe told his brother about seeing the old man who looked like Batchy, and about the strange coincidence of the dimes being exchanged for bills.

"It must have been Ratchy," agreed Frank. "I wish you had followed him."

"What I can't figure out is, if Ratchy is stealing old coins and is mixed up with counterfeiters, why would he go around changing good dimes at banks?" asked Joe, puzzled.

"I have an idea about that," said Frank. "Suppose the counterfeit coins were quarters and half dollars. He wouldn't try to pass them at a bank. He would go around to stores, making little, simple purchases; a package of chewing gum, or a newspaper, for instance.

He'd get his change in small coins-good money in return for bad. Then he'd go to a bank whenever he had enough dimes to make it worth while. The dimes would be changed into bills."

Joe was sure his brother had hit upon the correct solution. He suggested that they investigate to see if Ratchy had obtained some of his dimes in Mawling. A five-and-tencent

store near by seemed to offer possibilities. They 148 The Melted Coins went in and asked a clerk if an old man had been there recently.

"Yes. There was one in here about half an hour ago. He bought a package of envelopes."

"Did he get change for a quarter or half dollar?"

" I don't remember," said the clerk. " Why ?"

"Will you see if you have any coins that aren't good?" asked Frank.

The girl looked at the Hardys strangely, but she opened the cash register and produced several quarters and half dollars. She examined them, then rang each one against the wood, "Good as gold Why do you ask?"

"We're looking for fake coins," said Frank.

The boys went from counter to counter, but found no bogus money. They left the store, puzzled. Perhaps Frank's theory had been wrong after all.

In quick succession they visited a shoeshine stand, a newsdealer's store, and an ice cream parlor. In each place they had some trace of the old man. He had made small purchases and received change for a quarter or half dollar. But the money was genuine.

Baffled, the brothers went into a lunchroom. It was near noontime, and they were hungry.

They ordered sandwiches, and while the man was preparing the food, the Hardys tried to figure out what was wrong with the theory.

"Perhaps Ratchy really needed a package of envelopes from the five-and-ten. Perhaps he

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really wanted a shoeshine, and he didn't *wish to* run the risk of passing any bad money in the town where he changes his dimes at the bank," Joe suggested.

"That could be the answer," agreed Frank. "We may have to try to pick up his trail in some other city."

"The sooner the better."

The sandwiches were ready. Frank paid for them with a dollar bill, and received change of two quarters. He looked at them intently, then nudged Joe.

"These are just like the counterfeits Aunt Gertrude got on the train," he whispered.

"What's that? Counterfeits?" asked the lunchroom owner, who had caught the word.

Frank explained that the quarters were bogus.

The man picked up the coins. "Hm, they sure *look* good. But I guess they aren't." He shook his head in disgust.

"Someone must have slipped 'em over on me. I wouldn't want you boys to think I was trying to do that, though."

He was full of apologies, and gave them good money. Frank and Joe were excited.

"Was an old man in here a little while ago?" the former asked eagerly.

The restaurant owner reflected. "Yes. Old fellow with whiskers. He had breakfast. Say, do you think it was him that gave me those quarters? Now that I think of it, he paid me 150 The Melted Coins off with a half dollar and a quarter for a fifty-five-cent meal. I gave him two dimes in change."

The man turned to the cash register and extracted a half dollar. It was a very cleverly made counterfeit. The victim fumed with wrath.

"If I ever lay my hands on that old rascal, I'll have him thrown in jail," he declared.

" Maybe we can help you in that," said Frank. "Please let us have the bad money."

The boys ate their sandwiches and hurriedly left the place. Since Mawling was not a large town, they hoped to pick up Katchy's trail easily.

"Let's start at the bank and work in different directions," suggested Frank.

"All right. We'll meet here to report."

The brothers separated. For twenty minutes they inquired of various people-shopkeepers, a taxi driver and a peanut vendor-whether they had seen Eatchy.

None of them had noticed the suspect. At last, disappointed, the boys came together again.

"What shall we do now?" asked Joe, discouraged.

"Let's try a few more places," said Frank.

At a street on the edge of town they had some luck. After asking several more people if they had seen anyone answering the old man's description, they met a little girl who nodded emphatically in reply to their inquiry.

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" I saw an old man like that, "she said. " He came up from the bank just ahead of me."

"Did you notice in which direction he went?"

"He didn't go in any direction. He walked into that house across the street."

The youngster pointed to a small, neglected-looking place set back in a weed-grown yard. Frank and Joe thanked the girl, and hurried over to the house, which seemed deserted. They went up onto the porch and knocked.

After a moment they heard footsteps. The door opened. A burly individual of about thirty-five confronted them.

"What do you want?" he growled.

Then he frowned in sudden recognition. At the same moment Frank uttered a yell of astonishment. The man, untidily dressed, had his shirt open down the front, revealing an expanse of chest.

Upon that chest was tattooed the design of a Spanish woman's head!

CHAPTER XIX

THE FTJGITIYB

"It's the hold-up man?" cried Frank.

The fellow with the tattoo leaped back and slammed the door just as the youth sprang forward. The Hardy boys heard a key click in the lock. Then, as they battered against the closed door, they could hear footsteps thudding down the inner hall.

"I'll go around to the back!" shouted Joe.

He leaped from the porch and raced toward the rear of the house. But there was no sign of the hold-up man. Joe tried the back door. It was locked.

Suddenly the Hardys heard a heavy thud and a noise, as if someone had crashed into a thicket. They ran to one side of the building just in time to see the tattooed man pick himself up from a clump of bushes. An open window showed how he had made his getaway from the house.

The fugitive plunged across the weed-grown yard, and scrambled over a fence. Frank and Joe rushed after him, vaulting the fence. Then began a real chase which led farther and farther into the country. Athletic though the boys were, they began to get winded. They 152

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realized that their quarry not only was a husky individual, but that he must be pretty desperate as well.

"We've come over a mile!" panted Joe.

"He's-he's gone!" gasped Frank.

The tattooed man had vanished suddenly, although there were only open fields ahead.

The pursuers raced forward, looking everywhere for him. In the middle of a pasture high with weeds stood a weather-beaten, wooden box.

"Must be in there," declared Joe breathlessly.

He tried to yank up the lid, but it resisted his efforts. As it did not appear to be locked, both boys pulled at the cover, which finally flew up.

At the same moment, the fellow they were after leaped from the box. He tried to fling off the Hardys, who grabbed at him. Joe tackled him by the legs. Frank flung an arm about the

man's neck.

The fugitive struggled furiously, but the brothers clung to him grimly. Frank twisted his arms behind him until finally he yelled for mercy.

"I give up!" he shouted, squirming on the ground. "Let go of me!"

"How about that money you stole from me?" demanded Frank.

"I'll give it back. I promise. Let me up, and I'll give it to you."

The boys released him. As they already had 154 The Melted Coins shown the fellow they could handle him, they were

fairly confident that he would not attempt a second getaway. Sullenly he dug into his pocket and produced a wad of bills, wrapped in a rubber band.

"You'll find it all there," he growled. "I haven't spent any of it yet. Afraid it might be traced," he added.

"So far, so good," said Frank. "And now you'd better come along with us."

"You ain't going to turn me over to the police, are you?" whined the prisoner. "I've given you back your money. What more do you want?"

"You held me up, knocked me out, and left me in a ditch," Frank reminded him. "After all, that's a police matter."

"Aw, don't do that, fellows," begged their captive. "You got your dough back, didn't you?"

"Do you want to see me sent to jail?"

Frank was eying the tattooed design on the man's chest.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Butch Bauer. I'm a sailor," returned the other sullenly. "Leastways I used to be."

"How did you get that tattoo mark on your chest?"

"What do you want to know for?"

"I 'll make a bargain with you," said Frank. "If you'll answer a few questions, I won't tell the police that you knocked me out. First, how did you get that tattoo mark?"

"So far as I'm concerned," growled Butch Bauer, "I wish I'd never seen the thing. I got it done in Mexico. I was in a waterfront dive in Vera Cruz and I ran into some old pirate who said he'd tattoo a picture of a beautiful girl on my chest. So this is what I got. And I've had bad luck ever since."

"How about the man who did the tattooing?" asked Joe. "What did he look like?"

"I don't remember," grumbled Bauer. "Right after the tattooing job was done, I lost my money and missed my ship. It sailed without me. From then on I've just had bad luck. Took to stealing. If you turn me over to the police now, it's all up with me. Give me a break, boys. I'm not a bad guy. I've just had a lot of tough luck."

"Was the tattoo man a fellow called Blackbeard?"

Butch Bauer shook his head. "Nope. They called him Needles Ned."

"Did he have a black beard? Was there a fellow with him called Lopez?"

Bauer hesitated a moment, then said he thought the tattoo artist was red-haired. "I don't know what you two are driving at," he grumbled. "What's this Blackboard fellow got to do with it?"

"Ever hear of the *Curse of the Caribbees*?" asked Frank.

Bauer looked at the boy in surprise.

"I've heard of it all right. From the guy 156 The Melted Coins who did this tattooing job. From Needles Ned himself."

The Hardy hoys were excited. Maybe at last they were getting to the bottom of the mystery of the Spanish woman's head!

"What did he say about it?"

"Nothing much, but it seemed to make him happy to get the design tattooed on me."

Frank and Joe glanced at each other. That Was exactly the idea Blackbeard had in

mind! The same thought occurred to the Hardys. Perhaps this clue from Bauer, slight though it was, might be of help to "Mr. Spanish."

"I think you'd better come along with us," said Frank to their prisoner.

"You're not turning me over to the police?" whined Butch Bauer.

"We want you to come home with us. A friend of ours is interested in the *Curse of the Caribbees*. We'd like you to tell him your story."

Butch Bauer was suspicious. But his objections to going with the Hardys were quickly stilled when they threatened to turn him over to the police at once if he did not do as they asked. Reluctantly, he accompanied them to Mawling and climbed into their car. Frank drove, while Joe took charge of the prisoner in the back seat.

On the way home they asked Bauer whether he lived in the house where they had seen him. He said he did not, but would not reveal who did, nor his own address.

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"How about the old man? Does he live there?" asked Frank.

"Who do you mean?"

"Ratchy."

"Never heard of him."

"Maybe that isn't his right name," said Frank. "He's old and bent. Has lots of whiskers."

"Nobody like that was around there while I was in the house," replied Bauer. "Leastways I didn't see him; but then I wasn't there long."

The sailor would not say why he had come to the place; in fact, conversation ceased when they reached a traffic stop light and he tried to escape. Joe was too quick for him.

"One more of those breaks and you go right to headquarters," the boy warned him.

When they reached the Hardy house, they saw "Mr. Spanish" sitting on the lawn enjoying the late afternoon sunshine. As the boys came up the walk with Bauer, they watched the men closely to see if there was any sign of recognition. But the two regarded each other impassively.

"You've never seen this man before?" Frank asked Bauer.

"Stranger to me," grunted his prisoner.

"This sailor knows something about the *Curse of the Caribbees*, 'Mr. Spanish,' " said Joe. "We thought he might be able to help bring back your memory. Go ahead and tell your stoi^T, Bauer."

158 The Melted Coins The fellow repeated what he already had told the boys about the tattoo artist in Vera Cruz. But apparently nothing in the tale stirred any chord of recollection for "Mr. Spanish." He shook his head.

"I am most sorry," he said apologetically. "Vera Cruz-the tattoo man-the curse-it brings back nothing of my old life."

He got up from his chair and walked sadly into the house.

"Well, that didn't do much good," grunted Bauer. "How about letting me go now, huh!"

The boys were dubious. Frank had promised not to tell the police that Bauer had attacked him. On the other hand, they felt he was a menace to society and that the law, not they, should deal with him. The problem was solved by the appearance of a plainclothesman who came out of the house at that moment.

"Mr. Hardy said I might go out when you boys returned," he declared. "He says you-----"

Just then the detective's gaze fell on the person with them.

"Why, it's Butch Bauer!" he roared gleefully.

The prisoner lunged and tried to escape, but the plainclothesman's big hand closed on the fellow's coat collar.

"We Ve been looking for this guy for months! Wanted for half a dozen holdups and burglaries. Say, I'll get promoted for this."

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He snapped handcuffs on his struggling captive.

"Where'd you find him, boys? Why, this fellow Bauer is one of the meanest thieves in the state. We've got a lot of questions to ask you, Butch. The chief will be mighty pleased to see you."

The boys explained where they had picked up Bauer. They said little about his hold-up of Frank; only enough to let the plainclothesman know why they had captured him.

"I guess I'd better search you," said the detective, going through the man's pockets.

He brought out various articles of little value. The Hardys looked on, not particularly interested until some coins were produced from the prisoner's trousers.

"Let me see those," said Frank excitedly.

When the boy inspected them, he was sure they were counterfeit. Bauer looked frightened but said nothing.

"Where'd you get these?" Frank asked him.

"I dunno. Some store, I guess."

The others were inclined to think he was not telling the truth.

"We'll get it out of him at headquarters," said the plainclothesman. "Come along, Bauer."

He dragged the protesting prisoner away.

"So he's a big crook after all," said Frank to his brother.
"That hard-luck story was just a lot of bluff."

160 The Melted Coins "Now I'm more convinced than ever
there's some connection between him and Batchy!"

exploded Joe. "He just wouldn't tell us!"

The boys went indoors. Frank telephoned to Chief Collig,
telling him about the coins and suggesting that the police in
Mawling watch the house where they had found Butch
Bauer.

Aunt Gertrude came into the hall a moment later carrying a
tray. She looked a bit flustered when she saw her nephews.

" 'Mr. Spanish' looked so peaked and tired when he came in,
I thought I'd take him up a snack," she explained.

As she disappeared around the turn in the stairs, Frank
winked at his brother.

"There," he said, "is the lady who wasn't going to stay in the
same house with 'Mr.

Spanish.' "

Her nephews had long known that Aunt Gertrude's bark was
a good deal worse than her bite. This was just another proof
of it. They heard their relative knock at the door of the guest
room. Then came the sound of the door being opened.

A second later the brothers were startled to hear a loud
exclamation from Aunt Gertrude. It was followed by a crash
of dishes.

"Great Scott, what's happened?" yelled Joe.

"Perhaps 'Mr. Spanish's' memory has returned !"

The Hardy boys rushed up the stairs.

CHAPTER XX

MELTED COIN

Frank and Joe hurried into the guest room. "Mr. Spanish," looking very bewildered, was

sitting in an armchair by the window, with Aunt Gertrude standing beside him in the scattered debris of broken dishes.

"Please give it to me!" she was begging. "It can't be of any value to you."

The man stared at her in perplexity. In the palm of his outstretched hand the boys saw the queer gold coin they had found in the secret pocket of his suit.

"I-I 'm sorry," he said. " But I feel that I cannot part with this."

"What good is it to you? Why do you want to keep it? Please!"

Frank and Joe had never before seen Aunt Gertrude so pathetically anxious. She was like a child begging for a new toy. But "Mr. Spanish" demurred. He closed his hand over the piece of money.

"It is all I have," he objected. "All I have from my past life."

Aunt Gertrude turned away, and began picking up the broken dishes.

"Oh, very well," she said. "Keep it if it's 161

162 The Melted Coins so precious to you. But I should think a man who is living with strangers-----"

"Mr. Spanish" flushed with embarrassment. He got up from his chair.

"If you mean this coin should be used to pay the expense of my food and lodging-----"

"I didn't mean that," declared Aunt Gertrude, realizing she had spoken too hastily, and that she had given the guest a badly mistaken impression of their hospitality.

"I must leave here," said the man with dignity. "After all, it is not right that I should stay and be a burden to strangers. I shall go at once."

Frank stepped forward. "Please wait a minute,' Mr. Spanish,' " he said. " You mustn't do that. In the first place, we're not strangers. At least, I hope you don't regard us that way."

"And in the second place, you didn't force yourself on us. We invited you here," added Joe. "Isn't that right, Aunt Gertrude?"

"Of course it's right," she agreed, eager to make amends for the trouble she had caused. "The man is talking perfect nonsense. We're delighted to have you here, 'Mr.

Spanish.' " She gathered up the last of the broken dishes. "Don't know what came over me,"

she muttered. "When I saw that coin-----"

She piled the fragments on the tray and hurried from the room. Frank and Joe had to exert all their powers of persuasion to convince their guest that he should stay. He had Melted Coins 163

been deeply disturbed, but finally he agreed that perhaps his lack of complete understanding of the English language had been at fault.

"You are all most kind," he smiled. "I should have known that none of you would make me feel unwelcome. I hope some day to be able to repay you. And now," he held out the coin, "if you will give this to the lady-----"

"Oh, no," said Frank. "You may need that some day to help prove your identity."

They refused to accept the gold piece. Later, downstairs, they explained to Aunt Gertrude that the strange coin was the only clue they had toward helping them learn who "Mr.

Spanish" was. Frank told her that it had been hidden in a secret pocket of his suit, and therefore must be precious.

"Up to now we haven't been able to find out what the coin is," said Joe. "Apparently it's very rare."

"Why didn't you tell me all this when you found it out?" demanded Aunt Gertrude. "That's what comes of keeping secrets from me. My goodness, I can probably solve this whole mystery for you myself."

"Do you mean you know something about 'Mr. Spanish' and the gold coin?" gasped Frank.

"I know more than I'm telling," said his relative mysteriously, and refused to discuss the matter any further.

The next morning Fenton Hardy returned 164 The Melted Coins from his hurried trip West. His sons could hardly wait to hear the outcome of his endeavors, and wondered if he had been successful in solving the mystery of the shipment of gold.

"As a matter of fact, I was partly successful, " the detective told them as the three sat in the library soon after his return. "That suggestion of yours, Joe, was what really put me on the right track."

"What was that?" asked his son in surprise.

"You had an idea that the coins might have been melted down, so that's the lead I was following. I discovered that an old gold mine in the West had been bought cheap by a group of men from the East, although everyone thought the mine had been worked out years ago.

The surprising part of it was that they began shipping gold bars to the government soon after the purchase. They said they had struck a new vein of ore."

"And hadn't they?" asked Frank.

" No. The mine *had* been worked out. There wasn't any ore in it, and after a time it was abandoned. I discovered that the men were using the place as a blind. They were receiving gold bars, probably from the East, reshipping them from the mine to the government, and getting paid well for them."

"So that's the way the thieves disposed of the foreign gold?" Frank questioned his father.

"Yes. My theory is that some of the bars Melted Coins 165

came from the gold coins that were in the shipment. They were melted down. The thieves probably figured out this method of getting rid of them without being caught."

"I wonder if they're the same crowd who are back of the counterfeit silver coins that have been circulated around here," Joe said.

"Maybe," returned his father, "but I'm inclined to think the local outfit works on a smaller scale. Possibly they're a cheaper gang of crooks who would steal anything. They may have taken over some of the equipment of the gold syndicate. At any rate, it is now my job to track down that equipment and the men who sold the gold to the government."

"Wasn't anyone at the mine when you got there?"

"No. The outfit had been gone some time. But I had a good chance to look around." Mr.

Hardy examined some notes he had made on his trip. "Frank," he said, "will you run upstairs and get me one of my old letter files from the attic? I had some special correspondence about gold a few years ago. It's a file marked 'G.' You'll find it on an old table at the head of the attic stairs."

His son was glad to be of service. He hurried to the second floor hall and started to open the door of the stairway leading to the attic.

It struck him as odd that the door was not tightly closed. Ordinarily no one would go into the attic for days at a time. Now Frank 166 The Melted Coins had a distinct conviction

that someone had just come down or had just gone up. This was strange, as he thought his mother and Aunt Gertrude had left the house, and "Mr.

Spanish" was out walking with the plainclothesman.

Quietly Prank examined the steps. They were slightly dusty, revealing footprints. They led all the way up the stairs. There were none leading down.

Was another burglar in the house? Whom would the boy meet if he should ascend?

Breathless with excitement, Frank walked up on tiptoe. A step creaked. In the attic he thought he heard a rustle. He stood motionless for a few moments, looking up. There was utter silence above.

He took another step. There was a second rustle. The boy was sure now that someone was in the attic.

Suddenly he heard the distinct clink of a coin, as if it had dropped against another piece of metal. Frank stole on up the stairs. When he reached the level of the attic floor, he raised his head cautiously.

There, not five feet from him, was Aunt Gertrude, kneeling on the floor beside an old trunk. Quite unaware of the presence of her nephew, she was thumbing the pages of a book.

For a moment Frank experienced keen disappointment. That the mysterious attic visitor should be no one more sinister than Aunt Ger-Melted Coins 167

trude was pretty much of a let-down. Then he saw something else, something so significant, that he uttered a

gasp of astonishment.

On the floor beside the trunk was a great heap of coins!

The boy's involuntary gasp gave him away. Aunt Gertrude looked up in alarm. She

opened her mouth and screamed.

" Frank Hardy, what do you mean by spying on me ?" she cried out in dismay.

CHAPTER XXI

aunt gertrude's hobby

aunt gertrude later claimed that Frank had frightened her out of seven years' of her life.

As it was, honors were about even, because her shriek had startled the boy so thoroughly that he almost tumbled down the stairs.

' ' My goodness, Aunty ! " he sputtered. " It 's only your nephew!"

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself," snapped the woman, still trembling from the sudden shock of seeing Frank peering at her from the top of the steps, when she had thought herself alone and unobserved. "Don't you know you shouldn't come into a room without knocking ? ' '

"But, Aunty, there isn't any door up here."

Frank was looking at the pile of coins on the floor. Aunt Gertrude flushed.

"You were spying on me!"

Her scream had aroused the rest of the household. First up the stairs was Joe, anxiously wanting to know what had happened. Next appeared Fenton Hardy. Finally came "Mr. Spanish," asking if he could be of any help. He had just returned from his walk with the plainclothesman, who had gone out again on an errand.

Aunt Gertrude's Hobby 169

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Joe, when he spied the money on the floor. "Where did you find these, Aunt Gertrude?"

The woman gave in. She flung up her hands in a gesture of surrender.

"Oh, all right-all right," she said. "Now you know my secret. I suppose there'll be no peace in this house until I tell you all about it. I've been collecting coins for years, and keeping them in this trunk. I just came up here to have a quiet look at them, because I had an idea."

"Do you mean to say you collected all these, and never said a word about them, Gertrude?" asked Fenton Hardy, astonished. "I remember you had a small coin collection when you were a girl, but I didn't think you had kept up the hobby."

"This is what it has grown to be now," said his sister, indicating the imposing array of gold and silver coins on the floor. "It's my hobby. I've spent a great deal of money getting together these pieces. Too much, in fact. That's why I never said anything about them. I was afraid you'd think I was foolish."

"Not necessarily," said Mr. Hardy kindly. "Your collection may be very valuable-a good investment. It's probably worth more now than what you spent on it."

"In that case, it's worth a good deal of money," she answered. "There are some very fine specimens in this collection." Fondly she picked up one of the coins. "Here's a Queen 170 The Melted Coins Anne Shilling of 1706, issued just before the Union of England and Scotland. And here's a hammered shilling issued in the reign of Queen Elizabeth of

England. All my coins have women's heads on them; I don't buy any others."

Frank and Joe knew now why their aunt had been so eager to obtain the mysterious money "Mr. Spanish" had. They wondered if perhaps she knew what it was, since she had a good knowledge of gold and silver coins with women's heads on them.

Aunt Gertrude picked up another specimen from the heap. "Here is the only United States piece with a ruler's head on it. Do you know who that was?" she asked.

The Hardy boys and the others shook their heads.

"Another queen," declared Aunt Gertrude. "Queen Isabella of Spain. During the Exposition in Chicago in 1893, in honor of Columbus, our Treasury issued forty thousand dollars' worth of coins in honor of Isabella of Spain. That's the only time a sovereign's head ever appeared on United States money."

Engrossed in talking about her hobby, Aunt Gertrude had scarcely noticed that "Mr.

Spanish" had drawn closer to the collection. Suddenly he dropped to his knees and began handling the gold and silver pieces. He deftly picked them up one by one, and examined both sides before setting them down again.

Aunt Gertrude's Hobby 171

Frank nudged Joe in excitement. Then he nodded at his father.

It was apparent from "Mr. Spanish's" dexterity that he was no novice in the handling of rare coins. He did it with the ease of long practice and familiarity, rubbing his thumb along the milled edges, holding the older and more deeply worn coins at the precise angle where they would catch the most light to reveal every detail of inscription or design.

"Do you remember any of them, 'Mr. Spanish?' " asked Frank quietly.

The man glanced up in surprise, as if suddenly realizing where he was. The look of excitement and animation that had made his face glow with interest as he examined the money vanished. He shook his head.

"No-no," he said slowly. "I am sorry. They mean nothing. And yet when I saw them, I found myself wanting to look at them, to handle them. It is very strange. It is as if I know these coins. But I do not know them."

Aunt Gertrude glanced at him with an air of great suspicion.

"I have an odd Mexican piece here," she said. "It's a bit like that one you have downstairs." She fumbled through the collection and handed him the coin she had in mind. "

Does that recall anything to you, 'Mr. Spanish?' "

Their guest inspected the money carefully. But again there was no response. He shook his head.

172 The Melted Coins "I'm sorry," he said, discouraged.

"One thing I will say," observed Mr. Hardy to his sister. "As you know, there have been two thefts of coin collections in Bayport in the past few days. I hardly think it wise for you to

leave such a valuable one as this in an old trunk in our attic."

"You're right, Fenton," declared Aunt Gertrude. "As a matter of fact, that is one reason why I came up here-to see if the money was still safe. I think I should keep it under lock and key. In a vault."

"In Bayport?" asked Joe.

"I have a safety deposit box in the bank at Hanover. That is where this collection is going. I'm taking no chances," declared Aunt Gertrude firmly. "Will you boys help me pack up the coins, and drive me over to the bank first thing in the morning?"

While Frank and Joe remained in the attic to help their aunt sort and pack the pieces, Fenton Hardy and "Mr. Spanish" went downstairs. The detective asked his guest to let him see the gold coin again.

"If you don't mind," said Mr. Hardy, taking paper and pencil from his pocket, "I'm going to make a tracing of this. It may be helpful."

When he had done this, he folded the paper and put it in an envelope.

"If it will help me learn who I am," said "Mr. Spanish" seriously, "I shall owe much to this coin."

Aunt Gertrude's Hobby 173

The detective did not tell his guest, but his sister had given him an idea. He would send the tracing with a letter to Mexico City. Possibly the strange piece could be identified by the authorities there.

Upstairs the two boys were working industriously. There was a good deal of detail involved in sorting out Aunt Gertrude's collection the way she wanted it. Furthermore, every time she picked up a coin she gave a brief account of its history and probable value. Each piece had to be recorded separately in a small book. Before the boys knew it, an hour had passed.

"Mother is calling us to dinner," said Joe.

"We've just about finished," replied Aunt Gertrude.

That night she slept with the valuable collection under her mattress for safe-keeping.

The next morning she woke her nephews early, and shortly after nine o'clock they set out for Hanover in the car. Aunt Gertrude got into the rear seat with the collection, now securely wrapped in a box, and placed it firmly on her lap.

"Keep to the main highway and don't dawdle," she ordered Frank, who took the wheel.

"I don't want any more holdups. I declare, I won't draw an easy breath until my coins are in the safe deposit box."

"Don't worry, Aunty," they assured her. "Your collection is practically in the bank already."

174 The Melted Coins They reached Hanover without incident. Aunt Gertrude directed them down a street which paralleled the railroad tracks. There was a good bit of traffic, so Frank drove slowly, looking for a place to park.

Suddenly Joe cried out in excitement, "Wait a minute! Look, Frank! Down the street!"

From the bank, which was a hundred feet farther on, emerged an old man who looked like Ratchy.

" Watch him, Frank I" said Joe. " I 'm going to find out what he was doing in the bank."

He scrambled out of the car and ran up the steps. At the same time Frank jumped out and took off in pursuit of Ratchy, who was crossing the street.

"Look here-what's all this?" demanded Aunt Gertrude indignantly. "How about my coin collection?"

At the sight of Ratchy, the boys had forgotten everything regarding their original mission.

Aunt Gertrude, fuming and muttering imprecations against boys in general, clutched the box grimly, got out of the car, and marched quickly toward the bank alone.

"I never saw such boys," she grumbled.

In the meantime Joe had hurried up to a teller. Breathlessly he asked if an elderly customer had changed a lot of dimes for bills.

"Plenty of them. Nearly twenty dollars' worth. Why?"

"Did he say how he got them?"

Aunt Gertrude's Hobby 175

"Children's entertainment. A dime for admission, he told me."

"Thanks a lot," said Joe, and turned away.

"Wait!" called out the teller. " Let me in on this. What's it all about? Is there any reason why I shouldn't have changed his dimes for him!"

"Sorry-I 'm in a hurry."

Joe strode toward the door, failing to see Aunt Gertrude, who was just entering the vault at the back of the bank. Several people looked at the excited boy in wonder.

When he got outside, his brother was not in sight. Neither was Eatchy.

" Wonder where they went!" he thought.

Deciding to ask Aunt Gertrude, Joe walked toward the car. Then he saw that she too had vanished.

While he was pondering what to do, the Hardy boy heard the clang of a train bell. A local was coming to a stop at the station across the street.

"I'll bet that's where Frank is," he decided. "Eatchy is going to take the train!"

Joe ran across the street and through the station. Near the tracks stood Frank, looking up and down.

"All aboard!" shouted a conductor.

"Didn't you see him?" Joe, out of breath, asked his brother.

The last coach passed by before the older boy answered the question.

176 The Melted Coins "No old man got on the train," he reported. "Was the one in the bank Batchy?"

"Yes. "We mustn't let him get away. He can't be far off. We must find him!"

Frank did not move. He was still looking after the disappearing train.

"We've been duped," he said at last. "No old man came out of this station, but one certainly came in. I know it."

"You mean he's hiding in this building?"

"No, he got on the train."

"But you said-----"

" There's not a minute to lose! Follow me!" cried Frank, starting to run.

CHAPTER XXII

ON THE TRAIL OF LOPEZ

"where are you going?" asked Joe, trailing his brother.

"I'm going to follow the train in the car," Frank replied. "We may be able to catch it at the next station."

"But why?"

"Eatchy certainly didn't take long to make his getaway," said Frank, as they ran.

"That's what I was thinking," returned Joe.

"For an old man, he was pretty quick. So I think he isn't an old man at all. He's a young fellow in disguise!" said Frank.

This idea had not occurred to Joe. But when he thought it over, he agreed that his brother might very well be right. After all, old man Eatchy had disappeared quickly and completely. He could have gone into the station washroom and in a moment removed wig, whiskers and long coat, and put them into the satchel in which he carried his dimes.

The brothers raced down the street toward the corner where they had parked the car.

Aunt Gertrude was just returning to it.

"Well, I must say you boys left me in a hurry!" she snapped. "What was the idea of 177

178 The Melted Coins running away like that? I had to handle that safety box rigmarole all by myself."

< < We >re in a hurry, Aunty," panted Joe. He helped her into the rear seat, slammed the door, then scrambled into the front beside his brother. "We have to catch a train."

The car shot forward. Aunt Gertrude uttered a cry of dismayed protest.

" Now, wait a minute! What's all this about ? I'm not going on any wild ride-----"

The rest of her remarks were lost as the automobile zoomed along the road which ran parallel to the railway tracks. Aunt Gertrude lunged into a corner of the seat and came up with her hat awry.

While she spluttered angrily, Joe explained the reason behind their hurried departure from Hanover. Finally, as Frank guided the car out on the open highway, Aunt Gertrude began to appreciate the excitement of the chase.

" If that man is mixed up with counterfeiterers, I'd like to get my hands on him too," she said with vehemence. "I haven't forgotten how I was robbed!"

The next station was five miles away, but they overtook the train. It was just pulling in as the car skidded to a stop beside the platform.

"Pick me up at the next station. I'll walk through the train," said Frank as he leaped from behind the wheel.

He crossed the platform at a run and swung himself aboard the last coach. Joe backed up

On the Trail of Lopez 179

the car, and turned around to the highway so fast that Aunt Gertrude fell over in the seat.

"Next time I come to Hanover, I'll ride with people who are sane," she complained. "Now you drive carefully, Joe. Counterfeiters or no counterfeiters, I don't want to wake up and find myself on top of a telephone pole."

Joe passed the train about half a mile down the highway, and pulled ahead of it. The next station was eight miles distant, and he reached it with plenty of time to spare.

"What if Frank does find this old man you're looking for? You haven't any real evidence

against him," Aunt Gertrude reminded her nephew.

"We'll ask him a lot of questions, and if his answers aren't satisfactory, we'll turn him over to the police."

In a few minutes the train came in sight. When it pulled to a stop, Frank descended from the first coach. He was alone. From the glum expression on his face it was obvious that he had not located Eatchy.

"No luck?" asked Joe.

Frank shook his head. "He may have been one of the young men aboard, but I couldn't identify any of them as Eatchy. I went through every coach. Not a person had a satchel anything like the one I saw the old fellow carrying."

Aunt Gertrude sniffed.

"Now that this wild-goose chase is over," she *aid, "perhaps you'll be good enough to take

J80 The Melted Coins me home. Unless," she added," you want to go on chasing that counterfeiter some other place."

"We wouldn't know where to start," replied Frank ruefully.

Chastened, the boys drove their aunt to Bayport and put the car away in the garage.

When they went into the house, their mother told them Chet Morton had telephoned a few minutes before.

"He seemed to be very excited," she said. "I promised him you'd get in touch with him as soon as you came in."

When Frank called the Morton farmhouse, Chet answered. The fat boy was in such a state of elation that he could hardly speak.

"C-c-come out here r-r-r-right away," he stammered. " I Ve got big news."

"Found another coin?" asked Frank.

" You come out here and I '11 show you. Bun all the way. Oh, boy! Just wait till you see 1"

Chet hung up the receiver.

"Sounds as if he's discovered a gold mine," said Joe when his brother relayed the conversation. "Let's go out there right away and see what happened."

Mrs. Hardy insisted that the boys have lunch first.

" Whatever this great mystery is, it can surely wait until you've had something to eat,"

she said practically.

The boys had to be patient until after luncheon was over. Their meal was interrupted by On the Trail of Lopez 181

another telephone call from Chet, excitedly demanding an explanation for their delay.

When Frank asked the reason for his chum's state of agitation, the fat boy began to stutter, and merely begged them to hurry out and see for themselves.

It was after two o'clock before Frank and Joe reached the Morton farm. There they found Chet alone. He was on the back porch, just finishing a plate of jellied doughnuts. He was pop-eyed with excitement.

"I found it all by myself!" he declared proudly, leading them into the house. "Saw a place that looked as if some fresh digging had been going on there, so I grabbed a shovel and went to work. Look!"

On the kitchen table stood a box. Inside this were scores of old coins.

"The treasure!" declared Chet, slapping himself on the chest, and awaiting the congratulations of his friends.

"Good for you!"

Frank and Joe examined the coins. In the bottom of the box they found some numbered cardboard tickets, upon which were written descriptions of the pieces.

Frank looked at the back of one of these closely. There were two telltale words: *Carter Collection*

He glanced up at Chet. "You've certainly made a find. But I'm sorry to tell you it isn't the treasure you were looking

for."

182 The Melted Coins "What do you mean! Don't you call that a treasure?"

" In a way-yes. But really it's a coin collection-the one that was stolen from Mr. Carter's house in Bayport this week."

Chet was crestfallen. He had been so sure he had stumbled on the old treasure buried on the Morton farm that for a while he walked around the kitchen talking to himself ruefully.

Finally he brightened up.

"Well, it's something to have found Mr. Carter's collection anyhow. I guess he'll be mighty glad to get it back. You fellows had better return it to him. After all, you were working on the case."

" Suppose you come along with us. *You* found the collection," put in Frank.

"Not me," said Chet. "I'm going back to digging. I'll find that buried treasure if I have to spend the rest of my life with a shovel!"

The Hardys smiled. This was the first time in Chet's life they had ever known him to be looking for work.

"Where 'd you find the coins ?" asked Joe.

His chum grinned. " I was following Frank's route he drew on that map, just sort of to help you fellows out. About five hundred feet beyond that old well where I fell in, I saw the newly-dug spot I told you about."

" You 're a real help, Chet, "said Frank. «' It proves to me more than ever that the thief or thieves we're trying to locate head from Bay-On the Trail of Lopez 183

port in a westerly direction to their hide-out. I mean to find that place one of these days!"

The Hardy boys decided to return Mr. Carter's precious coins at once. The numismatist almost wept for joy when he saw his collection. He would have rewarded the boys on the spot, but they insisted that Chet deserved all the credit.

"In that case I'll see that he doesn't regret it," declared Mr. Carter. "I'll send him a check.

That collection is worth more to me than I can tell you. But isn't it strange that the thief buried it in a field?"

The boys did not mention their suspicions on this score, but after they left the house, they freely discussed this aspect of the case. Joe's theory was that the thief or thieves had hidden the coins in the field, with the idea of melting them down later to make counterfeits.

"Why do you suppose they didn't use the old pit ?" said Joe. " Because they knew that it had been discovered 7"

"I think not," replied Frank slowly. "In that case, they wouldn't have hidden the Carter coins near the Morton property at all. No, I believe the man who hid the melted coins in the pit was double-crossing his companions."

"You mean he never turned them over to the other thieves, and planned to go back for them later and sell them or melt them on his own account ?"

Frank nodded. "And I believe that person 184 *The Melted Coins* was Batchy." Then a new thought struck him. "By the way, we ought to tell the police that Mr. Carter's collection has been found. He is so overjoyed, it probably won't occur to him to do it."

He stepped into a near-by store to telephone to headquarters. As the boy had suspected, the police had not been told about the return of the coins.

"That's fine," said Chief Collig to Frank when he heard the news. "Maybe I'd better send some of my men out to those fields past the Mortons to do some digging. We may find the Wakefield collection, too."

"I believe Chet will locate it if it's there," Frank replied.

Just then Joe, who was looking out the store window while his brother was telephoning,

excitedly opened the door of the booth.

"Quick, Frank-look!" he whispered. "Lopez!"

He gestured frantically toward a man who was crossing the street, hat pulled down low over his forehead. Then the Hardy boy dashed from the store.

"Chief Collig!" said Frank urgently into the telephone. "I must go now. We've just seen Lopez."

"Lopez? Who's Lopez?"

"Blackboard's servant. Eemember? Can you get some men down here right away ? We '11 try to shadow him and keep him in sight. I'm On the Trail of Lopez 185

in a store at the corner of State and Carteret. Try to pick up our trail from here."

"All right, boy. Don't lose him. I'll send a squad car out," promised the chief.

Frank ran from the booth.

"Watch which way we go and tell the police when they come," he cried to the astonished clerk as he rushed out the door.

Frank overtook Joe in the next street. Lopez was about fifty yards ahead, walking rapidly. He darted into an alley, crossed over into another street, threaded his way through a number of lanes and byways, and headed toward the waterfront.

"Perhaps he's seen us and is trying to shake us off," Joe suggested.

"Let him try." Frank already had spoken to several people. Now he stopped for a moment at a fruit stand. "Do us a favor, please?" he said to the proprietor. "Watch us until we're out of sight. The police may be along in a few minutes. Tell them which way we went."

The man blinked. When the Hardys looked back as they turned the next corner, the fruit vendor was still peering after them in perplexity.

In this way, by speaking to one person after another, they tried to leave a trail as to the direction they took. But in the end, there was no one to whom they could give a final clue. In trying to find a person, the Hardys almost lost sight of Lopez. He seemed to vanish into thin 186 The Melted Coins

air a moment after hurrying into a dark, narrow street. Joe spied him going up a stairway leading from the pavement.

" There he is! Come on!"

The brothers walked quietly up the steps. At the top, a door stood half open. Frank advanced toward it and looked into the room beyond. There was a deep, maniacal chuckle.

" Come in, boys! I was expecting you."

At the same moment a figure lunged at them from the shadows of the hall. Each of the Hardys was given a violent push. They stumbled forward into the gloomy room. As the door slammed behind them, the chuckle became an uproarious laugh.

"Yes, sir, I was expecting you. And here you are. The two of you!"

Lounging against the wall, his arms folded, was the sinister figure of Blackboard in his full pirate's outfit. When the boys turned to see who had thrust them into the room they saw Lopez, smiling evilly, his back against the locked door!

"Ho-ho, so you're afraid now?" laughed Blackbeard sardonically. "Thought you were clever, following Lopez here. And him knowing you were behind him every foot of the way. '

Go out and bring them boys here,' I told him. ' Just go out in the streets and make sure they see you. They'll follow. Lead'em here,' I said. Didn't I, Lopez?"

The servant bowed. Blackbeard burst into a On the Trail of Lopez 187

wild bellow of laughter. The Hardys were considerably crestfallen. While thinking all the time that they were the hunters, they actually had been the hunted.

"Aye, lads," roared the pirate, "it's the sort of trick my ancestor Blackbeard himself would have enjoyed."

He arose, picked up a small carved chest from a table, brought it before his captives, and opened the lid. Frank and Joe got a strong whiff of a sweet, sickening incense.

"Just to make you peaceful," said the pirate, closing the lid.

Fearing they would be overcome by the strange odor, the brothers dodged to the other side of the room. What would this fiend attempt next?

"I have a story to tell you," Blackbeard grinned. "But first you must be in the proper mood. Don't try to get away, my lads."

He followed them, carrying the chest. The boys wondered if they should tackle the two men before they had a chance to execute some dire plan. Frank and Joe realized they might be tattooed with the *Curse of the Caribbees*, or become the victims of some other awful scheme of these pirates.

"Let's fight 'em!" Joe urged his brother.

But neither he nor Frank had the power to do so. Suddenly their muscles seemed to become paralyzed. Slowly they sank to the floor.

CHAPTER XXIII

the pirate's club

lopez propped the Hardy boys against the wall. They had never felt so queer before in their lives; their minds functioning normally, their bodies useless.

"I've got a story to tell you," roared Blackbeard, " before I tattoo you."

He pulled a chair toward him and spun it around.

"It's about coins!" he said abruptly. He straddled the chair and rested his arms on the back. "It's come to my ears that you're interested in 'em. Well, I've got a tale to tell you about some. I'll warrant you never heard a stranger story."

The pirate smoothed his beard and went on.

"There was a fortune stolen once," he rumbled. "A fortune in coins, and they were stolen from a rich family in Mexico. I know, 'cause the tale came to me from a dying sailor. He had it straight from one of them that stole the money. Hid it in a cave, the bandits did-a cave guarded by snakes."

Blackboard pointed a finger at his unwilling listeners.

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The Pirate's Clue 189

"Bad luck came to every man who had anything to do with that stolen fortune," he said.

"One by one, the bandits died. The man who told me where it was hidden came to a bad end. I took a few of the coins myself, and I've lived to regret it, for I've had nothin' but bad luck from that day to this. On account of the curse put on the money, you see!" "What curse?" asked Frank.

"Why, the *Curse of the Caribbees*, of course," roared Blackbeard. "The bandits didn't know about that, or they 'd never have stolen the gold pieces. It was put on when the coins were issued—put on all thieves who might steal any of 'em. I guess it was true, 'cause it fell on me. But I tried to avoid it by a charm."

Blackbeard rolled up one sleeve and extended his bared arm. On it the boys saw the design of a coiled snake.

" 'Twas said you could guard against that Caribbee curse by tattooin' on this design before goin' to the cave for some of the coins. But it didn't do no good. I've had bad luck just like all the others."

The pirate shook his head sadly. He reached into a pocket and took out a gold piece, spun it in the air, caught it in his outstretched hand.

"There you are, lads! See for yourselves. One of the coins that's responsible for the Curse of the Caribbees."

By this time Frank and Joe had come to the conclusion that Blackbeard was mentally af—

190 The Melted Coins fected, but they forgot this when they looked at the coin in his hand.

" It's the same as' Mr. Spanish's' gold piece," said Frank in amazement.

How he wished he could get up and grab it. Here was a wonderful clue, yet he was

helpless to obtain it.

"I also heard," grinned Blackboard, "that you could get rid o' the bad luck by tattooin' this design on somebody else. And that's what I aim to do right now! You won't get away a second time!"

At that moment there was a thunder of footsteps on the stairs. Blackbeard leaped backward.

"Lopez!" he roared. "Bar the doors! Block the windows! They're after me! 'Tis the *Curse of the Caribbees!*"

There was a resounding crash against the door. Another crash, and the panels splintered, the hinges snapped. Chief Collig and his men stormed into the room.

"Ah, thank goodness we found you, boys!" panted the officer when he saw the Hardys.

His men quickly overpowered the struggling Blackbeard and his servant Lopez.

"But you can't do this to me! I'm a descendant of Blackbeard, the most fearful pirate that ever sailed the Spanish Main!" roared the bearded prisoner. "I'll put the *Curse of the Caribbees* on you!"

"You watch your language and don't start The Pirate's Clue
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any cur sin' around here, or you'll get a rap on the head," Collig warned him. "Go along peaceable. Your sailing days are over, Mr. Pirate."

It was not until the fracas had ended that the police realized Frank and Joe could not get up. Collig was fearful of their condition, and personally helped to carry them downstairs.

"If anything happens to these boys, you'll be hung for it!" roared the officer at the prisoners.

He himself took the Hardys home. Before they reached the house, the brothers fortunately were all right again. The effect of the strange-smelling incense had worn off completely.

"We'll come down to headquarters to interview that tattoo pirate, if you don't mind," said Frank, as the police car dropped them off.

"Any time," said Collig, and drove away, thankful that Fenton Hardy's sons had suffered no permanent injury.

As soon as they entered the house, the boys sought out their father in his study, and told him of their recent experience.

"Blackboard claims he knows where a fortune in coins is buried. They're exactly like the one 'Mr. Spanish' has," said Frank excitedly. "Do you think we ought to get the two men together?"

Mr. Hardy was thoughtful a moment. "Did Blackbeard tell you what the coin was?"

"We didn't have time to ask him."

192 The Melted Coins The detective telephoned headquarters and held the line until the prisoner had been questioned on this point. The report came back that the

man did not know what the strange gold piece was. Mr. Hardy hung up and turned to his sons.

"I ought to hear from Mexico City any time," he said. "It would be best to do nothing more until I get word."

He explained how he had made a tracing of "Mr. Spanish's" coin, and sent it by air mail to Mexico. Half an hour later a reply came, and Mr. Hardy summoned the boys to hear it.

"This is a very interesting telegram," he said. "The Mexican authorities have identified my tracing. They say that about fifty thousand dollars in commemorative coins like 'Mr.

Spanish's' were struck in 1725 for the Arezo family of Carabaya."

"Carabaya?" repeated Joe. "Maybe it isn't the *Curse of the Caribbees* at all, but the curse of that place Carabaya."

Frank already was turning the pages of an atlas. Coming to an enlarged map of Mexico, he ran his finger over the various sections.

"Here it is. Carabaya," he said excitedly.

"We're really getting somewhere on this mystery now," said Joe. "Do you suppose 'Mr.

Spanish's' real name could be Arezo? I'm going to ask him."

"Not so fast, son," his father warned the boy. "Remember that two sinister characters, Butch Bauer and Blackboard, both had something to do with The Pirate's Clue 193

do with the likeness of the strange Spanish woman's head, which by the way is called Dona Luisa. I believe I'll put in a call to the State Department in Washington, and see if they have a record of any member of the Arezo family visiting in this country."

Mr. Hardy reached for the telephone on his desk. In a few minutes he was speaking to a government official. The boys waited attentively until their father hung up. He smiled as he turned to his sons.

"The present head of the Arezo family of Mexico is Ferdinand Arezo, *and he is now visiting in the United States!*"

" 'Mr. Spanish?' " exclaimed Frank.

"Perhaps. I understand Senor Arezo is about thirty-five years old. When he came to this country, he was accompanied by a servant named Manuel and a small dog called Chico."

"And has this Senor Arezo disappeared?"

"My informant in Washington didn't know. For all he was aware, Senor Arezo has been on a tour of the country. But if he dropped out of sight, it might be some time before inquiries would be started about him."

Again Joe mentioned taking this information to "Mr. Spanish" at once. But Mr. Hardy pointed out that he was afraid little or nothing would be gained by this method. If their guest could not remember his past, the mere mention of the name Arezo would hardly be likely to strike a responsive chord in his memory.

"I'd like to try another plan," he said. " Slip 194 The Melted Coins upstairs, Joe, and find out if 'Mr. Spanish' is asleep. If he is, don't waken him."

The boy went quietly to the second floor and looked into the guest room. Their visitor was asleep. Joe tiptoed down again and reported this.

"Good," smiled the detective. "Sometimes the subconscious mind will respond to impressions where the conscious mind will not. After all, 'Mr. Spanish' hasn't exactly *lost* his memory. No one ever does. He has merely lost the key, the associations that will awaken his memory. I think we'll go upstairs and pay him a visit."

Fenton Hardy explained his plan. It was very simple-so simple that at first the boys doubted that it would work. But at least it was worth trying.

Quietly they stole into the guest chamber. The shades were pulled down. "Mr. Spanish"

was sleeping soundly.

The detective walked softly to the bedside. He leaned forward and spoke quietly: "Buenos dias, Senor Arezo!"

"Mr. Spanish" stirred, but did not open his eyes. At a signal Joe made sounds like the short, shrill barking of a small dog.

"No, no, Chico!" said Mr. Hardy sternly.

Then Frank called out, "Manuel! Manuel 1"

"Mr. Spanish" stirred restlessly. Fenton Hardy signaled to his sons, and they left the room as quietly as they had entered it.

CHAPTER XXIV

A STRANGE STOBY

the Hardy boys and their father waited just outside the door of the guest room. There, at some distance from the bed, they repeated their performance.

"Manuel!" called Frank.

Joe barked frantically.

"Down, Chico! Down!" ordered Fenton Hardy. "I must go to Senor Arezo."

Frank peeped into the room. "Mr. Spanish" was awake. He was sitting up in bed,

staring straight before him with a strange, fixed expression on his face. The boy walked into the room.

"Good afternoon, Senor Arezo," he said.

"Good afternoon," returned the man with a puzzled frown. "Where is Manuel? Send him to meat once."

"I am sorry," replied Frank. "But Manuel is not here."

"Not here? But that is impossible. Manuel is always-" Then the Hardys 'guest broke off in dismay as he looked about him. "Where am I ? This room is strange to me. Who are you ?"

"Don't you remember me? I'm Frank Hardy!"

196 The Melted Coins Now it was the boy's turn to be astonished, because the man shook his head.

"I have never seen you before. Please explain this. Who are you and why am I here?"

Mr. Hardy and Joe came in quickly.

"It's all right, Senor Arezo," said the detective, smiling. "You are Senor Arezo, aren't you?"

"But of course. Ferdinand Arezo."

"You met with an accident," explained Fenton Hardy. " You have been very ill. But I assure you that you are with friends. We've been doing our best to look after you."

Senor Arezo put his hands before his eyes.

"Ah, yes," he said. "I was walking down the street. A man came up and spoke to me.

Suddenly he struck me and I remembered no more."

"That was several days ago," Frank told him. "Can you recall where you were and where you were going?"

" In the city of-Bayport, yes, Bayport," said Arezo. "I remember quite clearly. I was on my way to see a famous detective. His name-Hardy. Fenton Hardy. Of course I remember. Why shouldn't I?"

" Because," said Mr. Hardy, " ever since the moment you regained consciousness several days ago, you have been unable to recall anything about your past life. It wasn't until we found a clue to your identity that we were able to arouse your memory at all."

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Just then Aunt Gertrude came storming in.

"Now what is going on here?" she demanded. "What is the idea of disturbing 'Mr.

Spanish' when he's having his afternoon nap?"

"And who is this lady?" inquired Senor Arezo mildly.

Miss Hardy's mouth opened in astonishment.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed. "Is this a game? Who am I supposed to be? Mother Hubbard?"

"How do you do, Sefiora Hubbard," said Arezo politely. "Senor Hubbard is well, I trust?"

"Now wait a minute," snapped the maiden lady. "I'm in no mood for this sort of nonsense. You know mighty well there's no Mr. Hubbard in my life."

Frank and Joe were snickering quietly, enjoying the mutual bewilderment of Senor Arezo and their aunt. Fenton Hardy turned to his sister.

"He isn't joking, Gertrude. He doesn't remember you, or any of us, as a matter of fact May I present Senor Ferdinand Arezo, of Carabaya, Mexico, who has just recovered his memory?"

Aunt Gertrude took some time to digest this statement. She still was not sure that a joke was not being played upon her.

"Eecovered his memory!" she snorted. "If you ask me, I think he's lost it worse than ever."

198 The Melted Coins With further explanations, however, the woman was soon mollified and decided not to

be offended by the fact that Sen or Arezo could not remember her. The man got dressed and came downstairs, where the family gathered in the living room to hear his story.

"I cannot tell you how grateful I am for your kindness," he said. "It is so strange that I should find myself in the very home to which I was going when I was attacked."

The Hardys explained how this had happened.

"Perhaps you will tell us why you were coming here," suggested Frank. "Did your visit have something to do with the Dona Luisa coins?"

"Ah, you know of them! Yes, it was about the coins. You see, the pieces were struck in honor of my ancestor, Dona Luisa, over two hundred years ago. They were never used outside of Carabaya until her grandson, then an old man, set out with a great many of them for the coast. He intended to spend the rest of his life in Spain, but was killed in the hills of Mexico by bandits who stole his money. Only a few of the coins ever turned up, because there was said to be a curse on them-the *Curse of Carabaya*."

"My brother guessed that," said Joe. "We heard it called the *Curse of the Caribbees*."

"Many people called it that, after a time, but it was the *Curse of Carabaya*. My father felt A Strange Story 199

it was a disgrace to our family that the name of Arezo should be connected with such a story. He spent much time collecting any of the Dona Luisa coins he could get, but the

bulk of them never turned up. When he was dying, he asked me to continue the work.

"I thought that some of the pieces might have fallen into the hands of collectors, so I used to carry small books of rare coins with me. They helped introduce me to collectors, so that I could persuade them to trade me any Dona Luisa coins they might have."

"Was that the reason for your visit to this country?" asked Mrs. Hardy.

"Yes, gracious lady. But I had not been here very long, when I was robbed of my book of coins. I sent Manuel and Chico back to Mexico and came on here to Bayport to consult with Mr. Hardy about this."

"Why didn't you report your loss to the police as soon as it happened?" asked the detective.

"It was a delicate subject. I still had some Dona Luisa coins with me, and I was afraid of ridicule if the matter of the *Curse of Carabaya* should appear in the newspapers and get back to Mexico. I was told that there were no better detectives than Hardy and Sons," smiled Senor Arezo, "so I came here. But on my way to your house I was attacked on the street, and robbed of everything I had with me. Beyond that I remember nothing."

200 The Melted Coins The boys grinned at the compliment paid them.

"Perhaps you'll really think Hardy and Sons are good detectives," said Joe, "if we can put you on the track of most of the other Dona Luisa coins. Let's get the car out of the garage, Dad, and take Senor Arezo down to see Blackbeard."

"But this is amazing," said their guest, as he stepped into the automobile a few minutes later. "I do not understand. This Blackboard -who is he?"

"He's a bit goofy-thinks he's a descendant of a pirate," explained Frank, "but I believe he may know where those bandits hid the Arezo money. Blackbeard is down at police headquarters."

When the car pulled up in front of the building, Mr. Hardy, Joe and the Mexican got out.

But Frank remained behind the wheel.

"Aren't you coming in with us?" asked his father.

"I've just had a hunch about finding the coins that were stolen from 'Mr. Sp'-Senor Arezo," his son replied. "And also those melted coins. Do you mind if I take the car for a little while?"

"Go ahead," said Mr. Hardy. "Have Joe go with you. After Senor Arezo and I talk to Blackbeard, we'll walk home."

Joe climbed back in and looked at his brother. "What's your hunch?"

Frank pulled a road map from his pocket.

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On it was the pencil line running from Bayport through the Morton farm to Hixon.

"This may be another wild-goose chase," he said, "but I don't think so. Look at these towns on the map." He pointed

to Bayport, Mawling, Hanover. "What do you make out of their locations?"

"Not much," confessed Joe. "Let's see. We caught Butch Bauer outside of Mawling, heading toward Hanover. Katchy was in Hanover and took a train."

"Exactly," said Frank gleefully. "If you draw a line from Mawling through Hanover, and follow the direction of Eatchy's train, yo» come to Tryton."

"Why stop there?"

"Because if you continue the other line from Bayport through the Morton farm and Hixon, you hit Tryton also."

"Gee, that's clever, Frank," his brother praised him. "Well, what are we waiting for? Let's go to Tryton and find those men who stole the coins!"

"And melted them," said Frank.

"And made counterfeits out of them!" added his brother.

Frank drove as fast as he dared to the village they wanted to investigate. It was spread out over a large area, and included Upper Tryton, Lower Tryton, New Tryton, and Tryton Hills.

"I couldn't imagine a safer place for counterfeiters to hide," grumbled Joe, after the boys 202 The Melted Coins had ridden up one street and down another for half an hour. "What say we stop for a few minutes and get a soda? I'm terribly thirsty."

"Make it ice cream cones and I'll wait in the car," said Frank. "I may pick up a clue while you 're in the store."

Joe disappeared inside, while his brother looked intently at each passer-by. Presently a car came along from the opposite direction and parked a distance up the street.

Frank eyed the driver as he got out and went into the post office. He was an old man. At this moment Joe returned, holding two ice cream cones.

"What's the matter?" he asked, when Frank paid no attention to him.

"I saw-----"

"What?"

"That car by the post office. An old man got out of it and went into the place."

"Who was he? Not-----"

"I merely got a glimpse of him. We'll watch and see if he's Batchy."

At that moment the old man came out of the post office. He headed straight for the car parked at the curb, climbed in, and settled himself behind the wheel. The boys waited expectantly, hoping that at last they were going to catch one of the counterfeiters.

"He's coming this way! If it's Batchy, we'd better duck, so he won't see us," advised Joe. "We don't want to lose him again."

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The boy put his head down on the seat, but Frank merely covered his face with one hand to hide his identity. He got a

good look at the suspect and almost yelled in astonishment and delight.

"A *young* man was at the wheel!" he said to Joe, as the car passed them. "Ratchy *does use a disguise! Now I 'm sure of it!*"

" He certainly gets it on and off fast, but he won't run away this time. Why do you suppose he changed so suddenly?"

"May have been tipped off by a pal that you and I are here," guessed Frank.

Already he had started the motor. Now he pulled away from the curb quickly and turned around. Then he shot off in pursuit of young Mr. Ratchy!

CHAPTEE XXV

THE CAPTURE

"AT the rate Eatchy is driving, we're going to have a job keeping Mm in sight," said Joe

to his brother.

The man knew he was being followed. He turned down side streets, doubled back on his trail, even managed to shake the Hardys off for a time, but again they caught a glimpse of his car and picked up the chase once more.

Instead of trying to overtake Eatchy this time, Frank deliberately slowed down and allowed a big truck to get ahead of him. The vehicle screened the boys from view, but occasionally Frank would pull over to the middle of the road to make sure the suspect's car was still in front.

By this time they were on the outskirts of Tryton, driving toward open country. To Frank's satisfaction, Eatchy no longer was making breakneck speed.

"Thinks he's lost us. If he'll only go to the headquarters of the counterfeiters, maybe we'll learn something worth while!"

Fortunately, the heavy truck also was headed out of town. It trailed the other car almost as if the driver were shadowing him too.

"I hope Eatchy doesn't see us," Joe said, 204

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"He'd change any plans he has in mind if he thinks we're closing in on him."

The man evidently thought he had shaken off his pursuers, for he drove along at forty miles an hour down the main highway. Finally he swung into a side road. A cloud of dust marked his course.

The truck rolled on without turning. Frank steered the Hardy automobile into the side road.

" Now Ratchy will see us," said Joe anxiously.

"Perhaps not," replied his brother. "The dust from his car may screen us."

The dust rose in a thick, billowy cloud. If Eatchy should look in his rear-vision mirror, it was scarcely likely that he would see the car trailing him.

" Where do you suppose he is headed ?" asked Joe.

"Tryton Hills, I think," said Frank. "< This road doubles back there."

It dipped and wound among uplands and valleys. At last Tryton Hills came in sight.

Anxiously the boys watched the hovering cloud of dust. At the village it began to settle.

Ratchy's car was not in sight!

In alarm the Hardys rode along the main street. Joe glanced up each side road. Finally, at the edge of town he excitedly asked Frank to stop.

"There's the car!" he cried. "Parked in front of an old house way back from the street-Let'sgo!"

206 The Melted Coins "We'd better notify the police first," said his brother. "No telling who is in that place."

Frank drove past the corner and pulled in at the sidewalk. The boys got out, and called the local police from a telephone booth in a store.

"We can't wait for them, though," said Frank, after Joe had hung up. "Batchy may be getting ready to clear out. We'd better go right there."

The brothers hurried down the side road. The man's car stood in front of a shabby, weather-beaten house set in from the street.

"Take the back door. I'll go to the front one," said Frank as they hurried up the walk.

Joe slipped around to the rear of the building. As he ducked past a window, he noticed that it was boarded up. But he could hear voices inside.

Frank went to the front door. He hesitated a moment, then knocked sharply. He heard footsteps beyond. A voice said: "Who's there?"

Frank spoke gruffly. "Lemme in, Ratchy-quick! Hurry up!"

A key grated in the lock. The door opened suddenly. The young man whom they had trailed peered out. His eyes widened in alarm.

"Oh, no, you don't!" he snapped, and hastily tried to slam the door.

But Frank had thrust his foot over the threshold. At the same instant he lunged inside, and made a grab for the man.

The Capture 207

"Bun, you guys!" yelled Batchy, dodging him. *"It's the Hardy boys!"*

Frank tackled the fellow again. From the other rooms of the house he heard shouts and the thud of running feet. There was a yell of fright as one of the men evidently bumped into Joe at the back door.

Frank and Batchy wrestled fiercely in the front hall. But the struggle was brief. As the man thrashed about wildly, punching and pommeling in his efforts to escape, there came the screech of brakes.

A car ground to a halt in front of the house. Out jumped four policemen. They raced up the walk and plunged through the open doorway. At Frank's signal one of them pounced on Batchy.

"I don't know what this is all about, but it looks like we got here just in time!" the officer roared.

The police completed their round-up quickly. Four suspects were overpowered. One of them, who had managed to get away from Joe, was captured after a sprint across the back yard.

"I tell you I 'm not mixed up in this. I 'm not a counterfeiter," he whined. "I just came here to deliver a parcel."

"Who said you *were* a counterfeiter?" demanded the officer. Then he yelled, "Glory be -have we rounded up a gang of counterfeiters?"

Considerably to his astonishment, this proved 208 The Melted Coins to be the case. In the basement of the house was found a complete set of equipment for melting metal and stamping out quarters and half dollars. The Hardys located a large quantity of coins that had not yet reached the melting pot, including Doctor Wakefield's collection.

"Well, Batchy-if that's your name," said Frank," it looks as if your little money-making business is broken up."

"You haven't got anything on me," the man growled. "I didn't do any counterfeiting."

"Maybe not. But you got rid of the bad money. Also, you stole collections. And how about the melted coins you took from here and hid in the old well near the Morton farm?"

The last remark was a shot in the dark, but it told. Batchy turned pale. He licked his lips and looked around nervously at the other members of the gang.

"I don't know anything about an old well," he said feebly.

"What's this?" shouted one of the crew-a burly, red-haired man. He wheeled on Eatchy.

"So that's what you've been up to? Double-crossing us, hey? Pretending you were hiding only the coin collections, and all the time stealing the melted coins from us and putting them away for yourself."

If the police had not had the counterfeiters well in hand, it would have gone badly for Batchy.

"Double-crosser!" shouted another one of The Capture 209 them angrily. "You've probably been working on the side with the Cawdry gang, you rat.

You've been helping those gold guys that sold us the melting equipment."

"You talk too much!" shouted Eatchy. "And so does Butch Bauer. If he hadn't squealed, we wouldn't have been caught!"

The Hardys smiled, for Bauer had confessed nothing. As the counterfeiter lunged at his pal in anger, the policemen took firmer grips on their prisoners.

"All right, break it up!" ordered the sergeant in charge. "We'll hear all about this later.

You fellows can do your talking at headquarters."

At the police station the whole story came out. Batchy, disguised as an old man, went from bank to bank, telling the false yarn about the dimes from the children's entertainments.

Actually he had received them in change when passing worthless quarters and half dollars on unsuspecting people.

His other work was stealing coin collections, which could be melted down for the sake of the metal, and hiding them somewhere for a short time. Two of the other prisoners, who operated the counterfeiting equipment, occasionally went along to assist him. With the aid of a dog or two, they helped to create a diversion, so that Eatchy could enter a house undetected.

He also confessed that he had become frightened at the Bayport railroad station when Aunt

210 The Melted Coins Gertrude had threatened to turn the counterfeit coins over to Mr. Hardy. Using the disguise of a middle-aged man, Batchy and his pals had tried to locate the telltale pieces at the detective 's home, but had failed.

One of the hide-outs of the gang was the house in Mawling where Bauer had been caught. The ex-sailor was a born thief, and went off on little excursions of his own to obtain additional cash for himself. Once, when Katchy had sent him to spy on the Hardy home, he had overheard the story of the club money and robbed Frank of it. In his haste to get away, he had failed to find Chet's coins.

Frank asked Eatchy about the old well near the Morton farm. "Did you build the platform in it?"

"Yes. I knew about the well. Nearly fell into it once. Butch told me a story of how pirates built pits with platforms, so I thought I'd try one. You guys are smart all right-too smart. You nearly caught me that night I knocked your friend out."

"You did a good job on him," said Frank.

"Did you forget where you'd buried the melted coins?" asked Joe.

Batchy admitted that he had been confused in the darkness. He insisted he had found nothing in Chet's ditch.

At that moment Fenton Hardy and Sefior Arezo arrived. They had been summoned hastily from Bayport. The Mexican joyfully identi-The Capture 211

fied a bag of coins salvaged from the basement of the old house as his stolen collection.

But most interesting of all to Fenton Hardy was the clue about the Cawdry gang. When his sons told him about the slip one of the local counterfeiters had made, the detective asked Eatchy where the members of that group were.

"I'll tell you where Cawdry is right now," growled the prisoner vengefully. "It's not going to gain me anything to protect those big shots any longer. They've been blackmailing me ever since I bought this outfit. I hope they get twenty years."

"That was the bunch who operated the abandoned gold mine out West," Mr. Hardy explained later to the boys. "The last clue I needed to solve the mystery of the shipment of gold that disappeared from Bayport."

The next morning at breakfast, in response to messages he had sent to a large city in a near-by state, a telephone call came for Fenton Hardy. The Cawdry gang had been rounded up.

"A mighty fine piece of work you boys have done," he smiled at his sons, after he had come back to the table with the good news. "You get the credit for unearthing the information that turned the trick."

"A fine piece of work, too, which you all did for me," said Sefior Arezo. "You worked until you restored my memory. I shall be grateful always. Tomorrow I shall leave for Mexico to join my family."

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"With Blackboard?" asked Frank.

"With Blackbeard. The police have agreed to that. The man has promised to lead me to the cave where the Dona Luisa coins are hidden."

"I hope it'll be safe," sniffed Aunt Gertrude. "I thought he was supposed to be crazy."

"No. A doctor examined him," said Fenton Hardy. "He merely has a quirk in his mind, based on fear, about the Carabaya curse."

"Did he ever have red hair and use the name of Needles Ned?"

"No, only the name Blackbeard. He 's not a crook, either. He had nothing to do with Bauer or the other counterfeiters. Of course, a guard will go along, so SeSor Arezo will be safe."

From what Blackbeard told us in regard to the cave, we believe he's telling the truth about the Dona Luisa coins."

It proved, several weeks later, that the self-styled pirate had indeed been telling the truth.

The Arezo fortune was found where he had said it was, and the family was happy to have its name no longer connected with the unpleasant story of the *Curse of Carabaya*.

Blackbeard's mind became entirely normal, and he went back to sea, a happy man.

"In the meantime," said Senor Arezo, smiling at Aunt Gertrude, "I believe you collect rare coins of women's heads, Miss Hardy. If you will be so kind as to accept this one which you have admired-----"

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He handed her the Dona Luisa piece.

"Oh, I can't take this. It's too valuable," objected Aunt Gertrude, greatly flustered.

"But you must. After all, it was the clue that restored my memory. It would be ungracious of me to take it away. Always," said Sen or Arezo earnestly, "always I shall be most indebted to my dear friends, the Hardys."

While Aunt Gertrude was blushingly accepting the coin, Frank and Joe exchanged glances. Their minds held the same thoughts. They were glad, of course, that the puzzle regarding their unexpected visitor had been solved, and the mystery of the melted coins had been cleared up. Yet they felt a certain let-down that nothing in the way of more detective work was brewing.

Mr. Hardy guessed what his sons were thinking about. He smiled and said: "It won't be long before you boys will be working on something new, I'll venture to say."

This was true. In a little while they were to find themselves involved in "The Short-wave Mystery."

While they were thinking of this, the doorbell rang. Mr. Hardy answered. Two policemen stood there with a prisoner.

"We have orders to see if Senor Arezo can identify this man," one of them said.

The Mexican readily recognized the suspect, who turned out to be another counterfeiter, as the person who had beaten and robbed him. Mr. Hardy closed the door just as the telephone

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"Have just heard coin thieves are safely in jail, so I shall receive no more threatening letters from them," he said. "Please to give your fine sons my congratulations. They warned me to guard Chinese coins. I appreciate pieces never reached melting pot."

Mr. Hardy barely had time to deliver the message, when the telephone bell sounded again. Frank went to the instrument.

"Listen," squeaked Chet's voice. "I've got big news!"

"So have we," Frank told him. "We found the counterfeiters who melted the coins, and-----"

Chet interrupted him. "Tell me all about it tomorrow. But listen to *my* news. *I found the treasure!*"

"You're not fooling?"

" No sir-ee," shouted Chet. " The treasure of the Morton farm is ours. Remember the

letter Dad found in the wall? Well, I read it again. Then I tried a new place a few feet away from the ditch. I hadn't dug more than five minutes before I hit the treasure."

"Good for you!" whooped Frank gleefully. "What was it? Coins?"

"Hundreds of 'em. And some old jewelry, too. And-and-----"

"Yes?"

"Don't laugh. A book of recipes. My mother The Capture 215

says she's going to use 'em and make some of the finest cakes for me-----"

Frank was roaring with mirth.

"Hey, if you don't stop that, I shan't tell you the rest," complained the stout boy. "In the book was a letter. You fellows will be interested, because it tells about a mystery. I thought you'd want to solve it."

"Joe and I will be right over!" said Frank.

THE END

THE MELTED COINS

By FRANKLIN W. DIXON

No. 23 in the Hardy Boys series.

This is the original 1944 text.

Notes:

In the 1944 original, the Hardy Boys foil a coin counterfeiting ring who are stealing valuable rare coins and melting them down to make counterfeits of circulating coinage. In one reviewer's opinion this is the stupidest plot premise of any Hardy Boys story. The 1970

revision is completely different.